



Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the debate in the European Parliament on the conclusions of the Special European Council on 23 April: 'Tackling the migration crisis'

Strasbourg, 29 April 2015

President of the European Council,
Honourable Members,

Our response to the human tragedy we are witnessing in the Mediterranean was immediate but it remains inadequate.

I welcome the fact that the proposal that I had made on behalf of the Commission to triple the budget for the Triton operation has been accepted by the Members of the Council, despite some initial hesitations.

We are increasing the financial resources allocated to the Triton operation, bringing the total to 120 million euros. This is the exact same figure as the budget for the Mare Nostrum operation.

We are therefore restoring something that we had lost along the way. It was a serious mistake to bring the Mare Nostrum operation to an end. It cost human lives.

Italy financed the Mare Nostrum operation on its own; now it is the European budget and national contributions from every country that will finance the Triton operation. This represents a return to normality. It was not right to leave the financing of the Mare Nostrum operation to Italy alone.

It is often claimed - wrongly of course, and therefore constantly repeated - that the Frontex mandate is limited to rescue operations in the territorial waters of the Member States concerned. That is not true. The Frontex mandate is far broader. I will spare you the detail, but there is no need to expand and change the Frontex mandate. Frontex could intervene in international waters tomorrow, if that were the general will, and it already does in certain places and situations, as is only right. We do not need to expand the mandate, but we must ensure that the operation has the resources it needs to be able to operate on the high seas.

I said that the European Council's response was immediate but inadequate; what I mean is that the conclusions we adopted at the special European Council were wanting in ambition. Let me explain.

As Mr Tusk has said, it is not enough to fight the symptoms of the crisis - it is essential to do everything to make sure that these unfortunate people do not have to take to boats. We have to save lives on the spot instead of watching helplessly as lives are destroyed in the Mediterranean. The Member States must increase their development aid at all costs. This is essential.

As the President of the Council has just pointed out, the European Council will have to return to the issues that we discussed last Thursday.

I will argue, together with the Commissioner responsible, Mr Avramopoulos, for the introduction of a system of quotas. I proposed this at the previous special European Council. At the time, we ought to have marked our collective will to tackle the geographical distribution of refugees throughout Europe. We will have to do this. We cannot leave it solely to the Member States directly concerned to manage the relocation of refugees.

What we need is shared solidarity. To be honest, I have had enough of poetry. I find the rhetoric of concern attractive at first but not all the time. On 13 May we will propose a system of relocation throughout the European Union. Solidarity must be shared.

And we must, in all urgency, address the questions surrounding the concept of legal migration. If we do not open the door, even if only a little, we should not be surprised when less fortunate people from across the planet try to break in through the window. We must open the door to stop people coming in through the windows.

We cannot say: 'we cannot take in all the destitute in the world' - to quote one of your colleagues, a former socialist French Prime Minister - and at the same time say that we should not address the question of legal migration. Legal migration is part of the medium-term solution and so we have to act.

Now, Mr President, I also know that many sections of public opinion are calling on us, the European Union, to take rapid action, to do everything now that the heart ' commands'.

But we must also be aware that in six months, public opinion will again move in a different direction.

What I would like to see is for all those who now agree we should be arguing for legal migration and the introduction of a European quota system to stand by their words when public opinion has turned again.

Everyone here knows that the continent of Europe cannot be the one and only refuge for fighting poverty and hunger in the world.

However, as the richest continent, we must play our part in ensuring that people who take to boats, driven by necessity, do not drown off our coasts. That is our common task!

SPEECH/15/4896

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