

EPSU Executive Committee statement, 29 April 2015

**EU must assume its responsibility on the migration and asylum crisis in
Mediterranean and Aegean Seas**

Meeting in Brussels, European leaders of public service unions held a moment of silence for the 800 hundreds people who died in the Mediterranean sea on 19 April in the hope of finding a safe haven or a better life in Europe.

This came at the same time as another boat capsized in the Aegean sea killing 3 people and just days after 400 others drowned in a similar accident in the Mediterranean.

Since the beginning of the year at least 1,500 people have died while on route to Europe – 30 times higher than last year's equivalent figure, which was itself a record.

Most of the people, including children, who drowned came from Syria, Eritrea and Somalia and most likely would have qualified for refugee status under the UN Geneva Convention.

The Executive committee expressed its deep sadness at yet another tragedy that could have been avoided. Last year the ETUC urged the EU to finance the Italian Mare Nostrum's search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean that saved hundreds of thousands of lives. This was not agreed for cynical reasons.

It is appalling that the EU emergency summit on this humanitarian crisis held on 23 April failed again to agree on the most essential immediate action: search and rescue in international waters.

Instead, the EU increased the budget of Frontex without changing its mandate of border control, and maintained the limited scope of the Triton and Poseidon operations, meaning the EU as a whole will continue prioritising border protection, not protecting human beings.

Whilst the EU summit agreed the principle of sharing resettlement of asylum seekers, a step in the right direction providing the asylum seekers concerned agree to it, the figures announced by various governments are shockingly low compared to the millions of refugees in Africa and in the Middle East. Coupled with austerity cuts and unemployment in the South of Europe, the EU laissez faire is criminal.

People's safety must come first before financial considerations. The EPSU and its International sister federation PSI call for:

1. The immediate restoration of EU-funded search-and-rescue operations similar to the Mare Nostrum programme;
2. Providing sufficient and well-trained public service workers in reception and asylum processing centres;
3. Increasing efforts to ensure suitable living conditions of asylum-seekers and refugees;

4. Complying with the UN Geneva Convention and establishing safe, legal routes for those who flee war and persecution, and increasing the number of recognitions of refugee status;
5. Immediate suspension of the Dublin Convention according to which the EU country of arrival is responsible for processing the asylum claims of applicants, placing an unfair strain on countries involved in the rescue operations, in this case Italy, Greece, Malta, Spain, and Cyprus;
6. Establishing legal channels of migration and supporting regularisation of undocumented migrants;
7. Supporting ethical recruitment and retention of migrant workers in the public sector;
8. Stopping bilateral negotiations on outsourcing processing of asylum requests with third countries which do not respect human rights, such as Eritrea;
9. Carrying out ex ante social, economic and humanitarian impact assessments of EU external interventions.