

*This **Shadow Position** has been prepared by experts for asylum policies, human rights and peace-building policies, gathered in the Initiative “Welcome”, which is coordinated by the Centre for Peace Studies. It relates to the upcoming Eastern Mediterranean-Western Balkans route conference which will be held on October 8th in Luxembourg.*

SHADOW POSITION ON THE BALKAN ROUTE CONFERENCE

We have sent the following demands to both the EU member states and to non-member countries, because we think that the refugee crisis can only be solved through the cooperation of all countries through which refugees are passing, and by respecting the principles of solidarity and protection of human rights. The interests of Western European countries to close and secure the eastern EU borders, pursued through various bilateral and multilateral processes and agreements, have given rise to concern in countries on the (eastern) external borders, including Croatia. These countries now fear that they will be transformed into “buffer zones” as a direct result of stopping unwanted strangers on their way to the West. Since the so-called Balkan route also includes countries that are in the process of joining the EU, we see this is an opportunity for one of the key points of the accession strategy to function in a way that strengthens the protection of human rights, including the rights of refugees and migrants, instead of engaging in political trade offs aimed to stop migration flows. The decisions approved today will have far-reaching consequences on what it means to be an EU member state, on the very future of the EU and its survival as a place of freedom and human rights protection.

We demand and expect the following from decision-makers:

- **To establish mutual cooperation with the Eastern Mediterranean countries** – Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan – based on principles of equality among countries, while respecting the economic and social particularities of countries that have provided shelter for the largest number of refugees. An acceptable result of mutual cooperation would be a **political agreement to provide safe corridors for refugees through humanitarian evacuation or relocation**. We warn that any approach that relies exclusively on financial assistance or the creation of hotspots in certain countries is not a solution which will protect human rights and secure equal responsibility-sharing of the humanitarian crisis.

- In cooperation with other Eastern Mediterranean countries and countries on the Balkan route, the EU must secure **safe air, land and sea corridors** for refugees to reach their desired destinations. This must be done in order to put an end to the violation of refugees' rights, people smuggling and the deaths which are occurring on a daily basis during the land transfer and, even more so, at sea. **Safe corridors should be set up not only on the way to the EU, but also in the EU, to minimise the number of local humanitarian crises.** We warn that an agreement that focuses on strengthening border controls between Turkey and Greece, and which does not involve the establishment of safe corridors, will certainly lead to a rise in the number of sea transfers, the least secure mode of passage, marked with the highest death toll, especially among vulnerable groups.
- The EU must **initiate negotiations with international subjects** in order to establish safe corridors **to its borders**. The EU must also demand the activation of all available mechanisms for the **declaration of a humanitarian crisis**. Coordinated action is the only systematic response to massive refugee flows which, given that their causes are unresolved and complex, are not likely to end soon.

The EU must also initiate and implement other mechanisms which aim to provide safe passage to the EU. Abandoning or, at the very least, suspending visa regimes for a certain period of time for the particular countries from which large numbers of refugees are fleeing would reduce the need of these people to resort to extreme solutions, including perilous journeys in order to reach safe destinations. The only alternative solution is **the activation of the temporary protection mechanism**, so that all individuals **fleeing from conflict areas** are automatically guaranteed protection from violence, illegal trafficking and existential threat.

The European Union and its member states are responsible for the failure to implement this mechanism earlier. The temporary protection mechanism could regulate this kind of situation of massive refugee influx, enable protection and dignity for the refugees and the realisation of the solidarity principle. **For this reason, we call on the Croatian government and the governments of other member states to immediately launch the activation procedure for this measure in line with the 2001 Directive 2001/55/EZ.**