



Joint Declaration of the Working Community of the Danube Regions and the Council of Danube Cities and Regions on Migration and Refugees



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Preamble

The refugee drama is a decisive issue for the European Union and – especially in view of the so-called Western Balkan route – even more so for the Danube countries, whose eventful history has been marked by conflict and change. These countries are now directly concerned by the consequences of war and persecution in the Middle East and other parts of the world. At the same time, however, the refugee crisis is an opportunity for the Danube region, which may bring it closer to its desired identity as a truly European region.

The EU is founded on the principles of democracy and the rule of law, as well as the universal values of solidarity, human rights, equality and diversity, which are enshrined in the Treaties¹. The current situation puts our commitment to these values and principles to the test.

While we wish to promote peace, good governance, inclusiveness, cultural diversity and cooperation in our cities and regions, we are also called upon to guarantee support and asylum for those who flee from persecution and armed conflict and to foster the acceptance and integration of the refugees in our communities. Our organisations operate for the benefit of the cities and regions of the Danube countries and are committed to the shared European values and principles. We want to live up to this responsibility and follow the examples of so many members of civil society and people working for local organisations who, through their spontaneous and unconditional help, have turned cities and regions into places that offer shelter for those in need of protection, at least on a temporary basis.

Cities and regions in the countries of arrival, transit and destination of refugee flows are the first to be confronted with social, humanitarian and economic challenges. They provide orientation for integration, ensure the observance of basic human rights and offer adequate accommodation and medical care, and therefore require special support from all those in positions of responsibility. However, these tasks should be fulfilled in a well-structured and comprehensive manner, always with a view to long-term solutions rather than emergency assistance. We must therefore speak a common language and take a common position in order to concentrate our forces and thus increase the effectiveness of our action.

¹ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union:
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>

Statement

The Working Community of the Danube Regions and the Council of Danube Cities and Regions therefore issue the following joint statements:

- We welcome the conclusions of the Heads of State and Government adopted at the informal meeting of the European Council on 23 September 2015.
- We acknowledge the key role of and the shared responsibility for the acceptance and integration of people fleeing from armed conflict, without ignoring the increasing pressure on cities and regions of the Danube countries.
- We call upon the European institutions to intensify international efforts to end the armed conflict in the Middle East and to initiate a process of reconciliation.
- We appeal to the European and national institutions to include municipal and regional authorities in the decision-making process, as these have to coordinate awareness-raising and consensus-building efforts as well as the involvement of NGOs and groups of volunteers in the provision of assistance for new arrivals in need of protection.
- We underline the crucial role of border regions and cross-border cooperation in the context of the refugee crisis.
- Once again, we underline the importance of the *acquis communautaire* and of cooperation with regions and cities in third countries of the Western Balkans.
- We appeal to the institutions of the European Union to contribute expeditiously and non-bureaucratically to the funding of international, national and regional organisations and NGOs in the Danube countries, which depend on funds from a great variety of sources in order to provide assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers.
- We appeal to the institutions of the European Union and to the national governments to step up their efforts in the fight against alien smuggling and human trafficking; however, more stringent security measures at the external borders of the EU must not become a life-threatening obstacle for refugees.
- Finally, we appeal to all EU Member States not to give in to pressure from populist movements, as these only tend to reinforce historical dividing lines, drive a wedge between individual Danube countries and their populations, and destroy the prospect of lasting peace and prosperity in a common Danube region.
- The members of the Working Community of the Danube Regions and the Council of Danube Cities and Regions will make every effort within their sphere of action to advance the implementation of the aforementioned objectives.

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

Article 18

Right to Asylum

The right to asylum shall be guaranteed with due respect for the rules of the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 and the Protocol of 31 January 1967 relating to the status of refugees and in accordance with the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as “the Treaties”).

