



Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

COSAC Delegation Visit

Pozzallo, Italy

5 – 6 May 2017

Report

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Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Report on attendance at COSAC Delegation Visit to Sicily

5 – 6 May 2017

Background

1. The Migration Crisis has placed considerable pressure on EU Member States in the Mediterranean, most notably Italy and Greece. This was evident in the measures agreed by the Council to assist both Italy and Greece through the EU's resettlement and relocation schemes. As part of the response, the EU operates a hotspot approach, that is, the establishment of reception centres that accommodate and process the asylum applications of those who arrive in the Member States.
2. At the Chairpersons' Meeting held on 23 January 2017, the Italian Senate, through the umbrella of COSAC, invited COSAC members to send a delegation to visit the Hotspot at Pozzallo, Sicily. The visit was scheduled for the 5 and 6 May 2017, with each Parliament / Chamber invited to be represented by one Member. The aim of the visit was to understand the challenges posed by the steady influx of migrants experienced by Southern European Member States, in this case Italy.
3. Responding to the invitation, the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs (JCEUA) agreed for Senator Gerard Craughwell to represent it. The importance of addressing the migration crisis was highlighted and the Committee believed that sending a representative would further highlight its continued engagement on this issue and provide a useful learning experience. The visit further highlighted the need for EU solidarity on the issue of migration and how this should translate into a level of support that eases the burden placed on Member States of the EU on the Mediterranean.

Summary of the Visit

4. The programme for the visit consisted of two key parts:

First Part – 5 May – Meeting with Local Representatives

5. On 5 May, the participants met with a number of local public and civil society officials in Ragusa, Sicily, to discuss the migration crisis and its impact on the locality. Among this group were the mayors of Ragusa and Pozzallo, senior policemen and the heads of

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6. This was the first, plenary element to the visit, where the representatives of the National Parliaments who attended had an opportunity to engage with and discuss the migration crisis with local officials. There was some opposition to the relocation process, with two main reasons highlighted at the meeting:
 - The economies of some Member States are not strong enough to support the relocation scheme;
 - Those who did get asylum move on to countries such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

Second Part – 6 May – Visit to the Hotspot in Pozzallo

7. On 6 May, the delegation visited the Hotspot in Pozzallo. This is a reception centre for migrants who arrive on Sicily, where their applications for asylum are processed and the migrants themselves are accommodated until a decision is made and arrangements for their transfer to another Member State. A number of local officials accompanied the delegation during this visit.
8. This segment of the visit consisted of a tour to the reception centre (Hotspot) in Pozzallo and an overview of the facilities available. This included an overview of the processes involved in the humanitarian and medical care provided to migrants who arrive in the Pozzallo / Ragusa area, the security and immigration measures carried out and the accommodation provided.
9. A central issue was the identification and vetting of migrants at the reception centre, many of whom arrive with no documentation or originate in countries where there are no substantive records kept. Fingerprinting was also raised as a means of preventing re-entry, but this information is not shared with security services, for example.

Issues raised by Local Representatives

10. The migration crisis and its impact on Italy was categorised as follows:
 - 1) Immigration phenomenon in the province of Ragusa;
 - 2) The Landing System and processes / organisations involved; and
 - 3) The Reception Centre (Hotspot)

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11. The phenomenon, according to the Ragusa Prefecture, has occurred for some years now, with the province being, above all else, a direct landing for migrants escaping Libya for humanitarian reasons. Initially, these landings occurred in small crafts, while in more recent times, military vessels involved in Operations Mare Nostrum and subsequently Operation Triton and Euronavfor Med, as well as merchant vessels and the coast guard, have brought migrants to the Reception Centre in Pozzallo.
12. The local representatives highlighted the increasingly burdensome nature of migrant relief operations and the establishment of adequate admission and reception facilities. The management of landings by migrants involves a wide range of services, including medical, sanitary and psychological supports, as well as measures directly related to the immigration process such as photographing and fingerprinting.
13. Documentation provided to the delegation detailed the structure of the Hotspot and the facilities available. The buildings used by the Hotspot are on loan from the Italian Customs Agency. It has capacity for 180 people, split between two dormitories, one for men (136 beds) and one for women (44 beds). In 2016, additional capacity was added for 50 unaccompanied migrants. This was also taken on loan from the Italian Customs Agency. The building also has a refectory with tables, chairs and a television and there is a courtyard that is used by hosted migrants for sporting activities. In addition to this, a number of modular buildings are used as offices, storage and toilet facilities. The offices are used by the managing authority, Frontex and emergency / response teams based on site.

Issues raised by the Irish Delegation

14. At the Plenary Meeting, Senator Gerard Craughwell, representing the Joint Committee, highlighted the issues concerning the clearance of migrants in Italy prior to relocation to Ireland. At present, this is not allowed by the Italian authorities and there was robust opposition to this point from Italy at this meeting. It was suggested that as an approach, COSAC could discuss this issue at its next plenary and that it should be raised in the Agenda, while the secondment of personnel to Italy may function as a possible solution to this point.
15. A further observation is the vetting process for arriving migrants, with many arriving without any form of verifiable identification or documentation. This means that

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establishing the name and country of origin may be a hit or miss process and some arrive from countries where there are no or minimal records kept, which raises further issues. Fingerprinting and photographing is carried out, but this is to ensure that where a migrant is deported, he or she cannot attempt to re-enter the EU via another port or Member State.

Conclusions

16. The delegation visit to Ragusa and the Hotspot at Pozzallo was an informative visit and one where the delegation was able to witness the process first-hand and the highlighted need for solidarity from other Member States. There is an acknowledgement of the problem, but continued concern at the need to identify and categorise migrants between being refugees and being economic migrants. The statistics on the level of arrivals against the level of intake through the relocation and resettlement schemes is a further issue, with some Member States yet to take in any refugees.
17. Senator Craughwell represented the Committee at COSAC in Malta on 28-30 May 2017 and at the High Level Conference on Migration in the European Parliament, Brussels on 21 June 2017, where the progress in responding to the Migration Crisis was debated further.



Michael Healy-Rae TD

Chairman

20 September 2017

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Appendix 1 - Programme

Visit of a COSAC Delegation to Pozzallo

5-6 May 2017

Draft Programme

Friday 5 May 2017

Morning Arrival of participants to Comiso and Catania airports and bus transfer to Ragusa.

Hotel check-in

16:15 Transfer to the Prefecture of Ragusa.

16:30-19:30 Meeting with the following public and civil society officials at the Prefecture of Ragusa:

- H.E. Maria Carmela LIBRIZZI, Prefect of Ragusa
- Mr Federico PICCITTO, Mayor of Ragusa
- Mr Luigi AMMATUNA, Mayor of Pozzallo
- Mr Giuseppe GAMMINO, Chief Police Officer of Ragusa
- Cmdr Andrea ZANGHI, Head of Pozzallo Port Authority
- Mr Maurizio ARICÒ, Director-General of the Provincial Health Authority
- Mr Antonino SALLEMI, Provincial Head of Civil Defence
- Ms Giuseppina PIGNATELLO, Head of Sea, Air and Border Health Office.
- Officials of the UNHCR, Save the Children, IOM, Italian Red Cross, Emergency, MEDU (Doctors for Human Rights), Terre des Hommes will also be present

Q&A session

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20:00 Dinner at restaurant "MAD"

22:00 Return to hotels

Saturday 6 May 2017

8:00 Buses leave for the Pozzallo Hotspot

9:00-11:00 Visit to the Pozzallo Hotspot, accompanied by:

- H.E. Maria Carmela LIBRIZZI, Prefect of Ragusa
- Mr Federico PICCITTO, Mayor of Ragusa
- Mr Luigi AMMATUNA, Mayor of Pozzallo
- Mr Giuseppe GAMMINO, Chief Police Officer of Ragusa
- Ms Rosanna MALLEMI, Head of Ragusa Prefecture's Office for Civil Rights, Legal Condition of Aliens, Immigration and Right of Asylum
- Ms Emilia PLUCHINOTTA, Head of the Hotspot
- Dr Carmelo SCARSO, Chief Physician at Docks
- Mr Valerio D'AMATO, Police Immigration Office
- Mr Alberto SALERNO, Hotspot Law Enforcement Chief Officer
- Local representative of EASO and FRONTEX; UNHCR; Save the Children, IOM, Italian Red Cross, Emergency, MEDU (Doctors for Human Rights), Terre des Hommes

11:30-12:00 Press conference at the "Assenza" service centre, Pozzallo town hall.

11:30 Departure of first shuttle bus to Catania airport.

13:00 Departure of second shuttle bus to Catania airport

