

IOM 108th Council

Geneva, 28 November – 1 December

Greece's statement under "General Debate"

Thank you Mr Chair.

Greece aligns itself with the Statement delivered by the European Union on behalf of its Member States.

And this Statement could not have been more relevant for Greece than any other EU country, given that we have been on the fore-front of a migration / refugee crisis for the past 3 years now. A crisis unprecedented for European standards in its recent history, which made it all the more complex to address and manage successfully.

If we look back at Greece's own modern history, we will find that many Greeks themselves migrated mainly to the United States of America, to African countries and to Australia in the aftermath of the two devastating World Wars. Many Greeks traveled miles and miles in order to reach new lands which held the promise of a better tomorrow; a better life to be achieved through hard work and successful integration.

And work hard they did, and they did integrate, always keeping the flame of their homeland, their "patrida", alive in their hearts. And thus Greece has not closed its borders and has not closed its heart to migrants. We understand the necessity and we understand the reasoning behind making such a difficult decision. And we have done the utmost possible to stand by the migrants that keep reaching our shores, despite various constraints and difficult hurdles to overcome. Although attention has been shifted from eastern to central Mediterranean, I regret to once more inform you that the number of mixed flows arriving in Greece is still quite significant.

As we continue the process leading to the adoption of a Global Compact on Migration we should all keep in mind that migrants are people like you and me, like all of us, who embark on a dangerous journey in order to find a better life and a better future in a faraway land. We should also keep in mind that the world today is a much more dangerous place if you are migrant, especially an irregular one. Today the journey is much more hazardous, with smugglers and traffickers lurking around, with the exploitation of man by his fellow men being a harsh reality and an ever increasing threat.

It will take a large amount of open minds, open hearts and the necessary political will to agree on a Global Compact on Migration that will put Women, Children and Men in the center; that will take into consideration that deaths at sea and faraway land borders must stop; that will always remember that children are children and they hold the future in the hands; that smuggling and trafficking networks must be dismantled and that criminals must be prosecuted; that basic human rights are universal and that countries must adhere to international law and that successful integration is pivotal.

At the same time we should also bear in mind that job opportunities are not in abundance; that financial constraints do exist and that unemployment is a phenomenon affecting all countries; that states' laws and regulations must be respected; that legally staying migrants are indeed entitled to rights and these rights must be recognized. The only way to find a mutually beneficial and balanced solution to modern migration is through cooperation.

This is what we aspire the Global Compact on Migration to be. A global opportunity to discuss, exchange views, cooperate and reach a common understanding on how better to tackle this global challenge.

Based on the experience of the informal thematic procedure just recently concluded, we are hopeful that the same interest and awareness of the need for shared responsibility amongst countries of origin, transit and destination will be maintained. Deciding on a Global Compact on Migration should take into account all the parameters mentioned above and should find innovative ways of moving the discussion forward. Part of this discussion must be returns, readmissions, responsibility sharing and not finger-pointing. It is not going to be easy. I think we are all very well aware of that.

However, this is an exercise in human solidarity, in global understanding, in global governance. And thus far many global governance initiatives have proven effective as being result-oriented. We believe this can be true for the Global Compact on Migration as well.

In this framework, we believe that IOM can and should play a constructive role given its expertise on policy issues and their implementation on the ground. At this point, we would like to express our support to IOM's leading role in the UN System regarding migration and our appreciation to Director General Swing and his competent staff for demonstrating the capacity and ability of the Organization. Director General Swing's commitment and dedication to advancing IOM's cause has been exemplary. And it is proof that only through cooperation and commitment to a higher goal we can yield positive results.

It is exactly the same commitment which is needed in order to bring our discussions on a Global Compact on Migration to fruition. We are confident that we will be able to reach this goal together, through dialogue and understanding each other's positions and perspectives, constraints and limitations. Each country has its own. What we need to do is pull together and find ways to move forward together.

No man is an island. No country is strong on its own. But together we can move things forward. Let's focus on that.

Thank you Mr Chair.