

STATEMENT: ECRE ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE

ESTONIA TALLIN, OCTOBER 2017

ECRE: speaking up for rational, evidence-based refugee policy

The panicked reactions at EU and Member State level to an increase of people fleeing conflict or persecution to seek protection in Europe turned into a full-blown political crisis in 2015/2016. The human rights of refugees, migrants and others, as well as democratic processes and the rule of law itself, were all thrown into jeopardy, and with them the credibility of Europe as a global champion of human rights. European civil society organisations, volunteers and grassroots organisations mobilized rapidly and extensively to support and assist refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced persons. As part of this resistance, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles ECRE representing a record number of 96 member organisations in 40 countries urges politicians at EU and Member State level to return to a rational and humane refugee policy in Europe.

Even at the height of the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015, the number of people arriving in Europe was modest compared to the situation in the often unstable and poor regions of the world, which host more than 85% of the 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons across the globe.

“I cannot think of a situation where early warning has worked so well but early listening and action so poorly. In retrospect, it is hard to believe that Europe was so ill-prepared for a very predictable increase in arrivals, given the information available about the conflict in Syria, the main factor generating increase. The majority of those arriving needed protection and they were met not with coherent, responsible or reasonable management from our politicians but rather with a range of ad hoc, short-sighted and sometimes illegal measures, including push-back’s, barricades at the borders and eventually EU-sponsored and/or bilateral deals with third countries. It is clear that this has serious impact on Europe’s global position and that it is not in its long-term interests. It is equally clear that civil society has a key role to play in restoring reason and responsibility in Europe. We are ready to take on that role,” says Morten Kjaerum, Chair of the ECRE Board.

While a rag-bag of xenophobic and extremist forces have exploited the insecurity provoked by the mismanagement, public opinion studies and election results demonstrate that their public appeal is often exaggerated. However, they are successful at influencing the political debate and provoking panic at the political level. It is time to return to reason – facts, evidence, and rational policy-making.

“Instead of sealing off European borders and allowing the erosion of human rights, and instead of allowing the migration control agenda to corrupt development and security policies and instead of allowing Europe’s global role to be defined by dubious deals with third countries, we need to take an objective look at the numbers. Europe is one of the richest regions in the world and perfectly capable of taking on its fair responsibility for the global displacement crisis and in fact it is a continent demographically challenged and potentially benefiting from new populations,” ECRE Secretary General Catherine Woollard.

ECRE’S VISION OF EUROPE’S ROLE IN THE GLOBAL REFUGEE PROTECTION REGIME offers key recommendations based on civil society expertise:

- Policy Paper 1: [Protection in Europe: Safe and Legal Access Channels](#), February 2017
- Policy Paper 2: [Principles for Fair and Sustainable Refugee Protection in Europe](#), February 2017
- Policy Paper 3: [Eu External Cooperation and Global Responsibility Sharing: Towards an Eu Agenda for Refugee Protection](#), 2017