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Ares

Dear Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your letter of 27 July, in which you express your concerns about the current situation with rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean.

As you know, I have personally, repeatedly deplored any loss of life in the Mediterranean and I would like to assure you that the Commission continues to follow the migratory situation along the Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean routes very closely.

While the coordination of rescue operations, including the designation of a safe port of disembarkation, are a national responsibility under international law where the Commission has no operational tasks, we expect all actors including Member States to comply with their relevant obligations under European and international law and act in a coordinated way, and in a spirit of cooperation.

At EU level, the Commission has repeatedly pointed out the need to develop a sustainable and structured European approach to search and rescue. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum aims to address the specific realities of search and rescue in the Mediterranean, by developing a more predictable solidarity mechanism that will allow for clearer operational procedures and by facilitating a more systematic dialogue and cooperation among Member States, and with private operators of vessels regularly involved in rescue activities at sea.

At the same time, the Commission remains committed to provide financial and operational support to the Member States most affected by migratory pressure to ensure that a fair and effective asylum and migration management system is in place. As part of these efforts, we have been constantly encouraging all Member States to express tangible solidarity with the Member States of disembarkation and we continue to coordinate voluntary relocation exercises from Italy and Malta.

Even though most voluntary relocations had to be put on hold between March and May, due to the restrictions put in place to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission remained in contact with all Member States involved in order to immediately resume operations as soon as the restrictions started to be lifted. To date, 2,057 people have been transferred from Italy and Malta to other Member States, 234 of which during the last 3 months since operations were resumed at the end of May. We remain committed to support this process.

In closing, I would like to underline once again that our aim remains to prevent lives being lost at sea and to ensure fair and effective migration management. The political support of the European Parliament will be key in this and I look forward to further exchanges with you to achieve these goals.

Yours sincerely,



Ylva Johansson

Annex: Recipients