

**Official Speech of the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Malta Honourable Evarist Bartolo.**

**A Frank and Concrete view from Malta about Migration**

The effectiveness of the Global Compact ultimately depends on its ability to address the specific and particular problems of countries and people around the world.

We are the smallest and most densely populated country in the European Union. We are also the most vulnerable as we are right in the middle of the Central Mediterranean migratory route where departures from Libya and Tunisia have more than trebled this year. We do not have the carrying capacity to take in more irregular migrants and becoming a migrant reception centre for Europe will destroy our economy and livelihood for our people.

Everyone tells us that we must not be allowed to carry this burden on our own. Yet this is what often happens.

Relocation has helped a bit but has certainly not solved our problems. In 15 years, our European Union partners took 8% only of our arrivals.

The difficult times we are in: Covid-19 and suffering, anxiety and economic uncertainty it has brought with it and the prevailing mood of European voters are making it more difficult for our European partners to take their share of irregular migrants that reach our shores.

As human traffickers continue to send more migrant boats from North Africa towards Europe, we are caught between two extremes which we both reject: let them drown and let them all in.

We do not want to do either.

But we have no alternative to cooperate with Libya to intercept and take back the boats of irregular migrants.

This year we have had over two thousand irregular migrants coming to Malta. Proportionately, that is the equivalent of two million arriving in the European Union.

Without the help of Libya, over 9,000 would have arrived and it would be a huge crisis and emergency for us, which we cannot allow to happen.

We understand that irregular migration is a complex problem and those who provide simple solutions are not realistic.

First of all half of those who come to Malta are not eligible for asylum.

While we need to have safe and regular migration, we must do all we can to stop irregular migration and send irregular migrants back to where they came from. And we need to help each other to do that as quickly as possible.

We know that the other side of irregular migration is joblessness. We need to engage economically with the countries of origin and have terms of trade that allows them to create wealth and jobs so that young people work in countries where they are born. We must allow these countries of origin to move into manufacturing and services. We need to help transit countries manage their borders better to prevent the human traffickers from carrying out their criminal business.

We need to take on and attack and bring to justice the human traffickers wherever they are.

We must ensure that the centres where irregular migrants are kept till their applications are processed are centres where all the persons are treated humanely and their human rights safeguarded.

Relocation remains essential for those who deserve protection and asylum.

People having to leave their country is a symptom of bigger problems: unemployment, wars, persecutions, abuse of human rights, corruption, illicit financial flows from Africa, bad governance, climate change, injustice ... treating the symptom without addressing the causes is very short sighted and it is just like putting our finger in the dyke.

Sending countries, transit countries, receiving countries....let us do all we can to understand each other and work together to address this global challenge of migration which affects so many millions of vulnerable human beings around the world.