



**European Commission - Speech**  
**[Check Against Delivery]**



**Commissioner Johansson's Opening Statement - European Parliament  
Plenary Debate on Search and Rescue in the Mediterranean**

Strasbourg, 12 July 2023

Dear President,

Honourable Members

The Adriana sank on 14 June.

The loss: as many as 600 souls.

Making this one of the worst shipwrecks.

Not just in the Mediterranean.

Not just of migrant vessels.

But one of the worst shipwrecks this century worldwide.

We must honour the dead.

Help the survivors.

Establish the facts.

What appears to have happened:

The smugglers brought their victims to the trawler  
that was to be their tomb.

Packed them like sardines. Like cattle. Like cargo.

Possibly 750 people.

Women and children down below

The boat drifting. Rocking. We can all imagine the panic spreading.

In the dead of the night

The Adriana suddenly turned over and sank.

Four kilometres down into the abyss.

Dragging all within down with her.

None of the women and children survived.

The Commission immediately contacted Frontex Executive Director Hans Leijten.

I also spoke with the Greek caretaker government and the Head of the Hellenic Coast Guard.

And with the newly appointed Greek ministers last week.

Our agencies intervened also immediately.

Frontex by air identified the vessel at the scene.

The Frontex Executive Director was on the ground in Greece the next day to support.

Frontex also launched a serious incident report.

The EU Asylum Agency helped survivors in Malakasa.

Just over 100 people were saved from the sea after the Adriana capsized.

There are many unanswered questions.

Now we need to establish exactly what happened.

Every step of that fatal journey.

And why the Adriana sank.

The Greek General Prosecutor launched an investigation.

The Prosecutor investigates the smuggling.

The Naval Court, the Greek coast guard's response.

These investigations need to bring trust.

And confidence that the facts can be established.

Including the smuggling route followed.

We know that the practice of irregular departures from eastern Libya has increased by 600% this year.

Libya remains a very complicated situation.

Again shown this week. Let me make clear, coastguards have to carry out their responsibilities in full respect of international law.

This means any demonstration of violence is unacceptable.

Let us remember our fundamental principle.

Our first duty is to save lives.

This is what coastguards in countries of first entry are doing on a daily basis.

The EU does everything in its power to support Member States on search and rescue.

This year alone, Frontex helped to save 20,000 lives.

The Commission relaunched the Search and Rescue Contact Group and pushes Member States to make progress, working towards a common Framework on Search and Rescue.

And in the Pact we are stepping up our ambition with special solidarity measures for search and rescue.

And any serious attempt on saving lives has to also include developing legal pathways and information campaigns along irregular routes to alert people of deadly dangers.

We are supporting such campaigns in Morocco, Tunisia, Niger, Senegal, Mauritania and the Gambia.

And we must fight the smugglers, who sold people tickets not to Europe, but to their deaths.

Last week, Europol announced the dismantling by Spain of a smuggling gang which spanned nine countries.

We have set up operational anti-smuggling partnerships.

With Niger, with Morocco, with Tunisia.

I welcome Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif's order to crackdown on the smugglers, right after the disaster.

And we're working with Senegal on the Atlantic Route.

A route that again this week revealed how deadly it is.

Last month we proposed a toolbox to address misuse of commercial transport for irregular migration.

We must change smuggling from a low risk, high profit crime, into a high risk, low profit crime.

We need EU laws fit for purpose.

I already issued guidance on non-criminalisation of genuine humanitarian assistance.

And now the Commission is also assessing the Facilitator's Package, which is over 20 years old.

Last Tuesday I was in Lampedusa with Minister Piantedosi.

4,000 people had arrived on the weekend, the majority immediately transferred, only 500 were left. And the facilities were dignified and respectful.

I met a young man from Chad a young woman from and Ivory Coast. So full of energy, plans and ambition. Already learning Italian. Our economies need young people like these.

They told me they had walked two months through the desert before paying the smugglers, taking the boat from Tunisia.

This is not the way to come to Europe.

We will need to continue to work on legal pathways.

We will implement Talent partnerships for labour migration.

And in October we will propose an EU Talent Pool to match talent with employers

I have also asked Member States to pledge generously on resettlement for refugees.

Only with a comprehensive approach:

preventing departures, fighting smugglers, improving legal pathways and working in close partnership with countries of origin and transit, can we manage migration safely and effectively.

And of course, we need an agreement on the Pact.

We are making good progress.

And I welcome the message from the Spanish Minister of State on the good progress that the Spanish Presidency is now doing.

And I call on you to seize the opportunity to reach an agreement within this mandate.

Above the Adriana the waters are now silent.

No tombstone, no marker, nothing to remember the names.

Let our action be our monument.

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