Statement by the European Commission on the situation in the Central Mediterranean

Brussels, 9 November 2022

The European Commission calls for the immediate disembarkation, at the nearest place of safety, of all persons rescued and who are on board the Ocean Viking.

The situation onboard the vessel has reached a critical level and needs to be urgently addressed to avoid a humanitarian tragedy.

The legal obligation to rescue and to ensure the safety of life at sea is clear and unequivocal, irrespective of the circumstances that lead people to be in a situation of distress.

The Commission recalls the principle of sincere cooperation and calls on Member States to work together to ensure a common response, with the sanctity of life being of utmost importance and primary consideration.

It is important to provide support to those Member States regularly receiving arrivals by sea. Based on the commonly agreed Solidarity Mechanism, a significant number of relocation places are available to help alleviate some of the pressure through relocation to other Member States.

Migration management is addressed most effectively by Member States working together to obtain common European solutions.

The specificity of search and rescue practices, which have arisen in the Mediterranean over the past years, and as we see them today, require a structural, reliable, and sustainable framework, in line with EU competences and international standards.

As part of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, in addition to a strong solidarity mechanism, the Commission set out a path for a common response to search and rescue. This is a key element of European integrated border management.

The Commission will reinvigorate the work to reinforce cooperation among Member States on search and rescue activities. It will therefore urgently convene Member States to work further on common solutions and expects all Member States to participate in a spirit of sincere cooperation, solidarity, and mutual trust.

The situation we are witnessing in the Mediterranean exposes yet again the urgent need for a singular, cohesive, migration and asylum policy. The Commission proposed such a system two years ago and takes this opportunity to renew its call on Member States and the European Parliament to advance work on its adoption.

It is having a proper, sustainable framework of migration management at EU level – in the form of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum – that will provide the structural solution to these situations.

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