



24 April 2008

## **Stop hypocrisy on burden sharing, says MEP**

*"The need to share the burden of illegal immigration in the Mediterranean cannot be more stark"* - MEP Simon Busuttil

Addressing the plenary session of the European Parliament this week, Busuttil called on EU countries to avoid a repetition of incidents that took place last year where immigrants caught in difficulty in Libya's search and rescue maritime region were left clinging to a tuna-boat, with Libya doing nothing and EU countries pointing at each other over who should take the immigrants.

The debate, which was requested by the EPP-ED group, discussed the level of preparedness of EU countries in the face of another immigration season. Busuttil is the group's spokesperson on the EU external borders agency, Frontex.

On Frontex, Busuttil stated this will be a test year for the agency and that the European Parliament will be closely observing its work and expected it to be more effective. More so after its budget had been doubled and after it had been given more and better means to operate, including the setting up of a "Rapid Border Intervention Team" to deal with emergency situations.

*"If Frontex wants our support it must demonstrate that it truly deserves it."* Busuttil said.

However, Busuttil acknowledged that Frontex was only part of the solution and the solution had to include a serious discussion on burden-sharing. He criticised EU governments for avoiding this discussion.

*"Stop the hypocrisy of being scandalised at the loss of lives in the Mediterranean but then leaving Southern EU countries to carry the burden on their own."* he charged.

In the Mediterranean sea, he said, the need for burden sharing could not be more stark since serious incidents had taken place in international waters which did not fall under the responsibility of EU countries.

*"I ask the Commission and Council: What will they do this year? There is no doubt that everyone has an obligation to save lives. But who will assume the responsibility for immigrants who are saved? Is there one single country that should carry this on its own or is this a burden that should be shared by all?"* Busuttil asked.

He said that the time had come for the Commission and EU governments to pluck up enough courage to answer these questions.

The debate was also addressed by EU Commissioner Jacques Barrot and Slovenian Minister Lenarcic, on behalf of the EU Presidency.

.....

### **Office of Simon Busuttil MEP**

Kevin Mizzi in Valletta: (356) 21228585