



Migrants at sea: guidelines for EU border patrols

EU guidelines saying that border patrols have a moral duty to rescue migrants in distress at sea passed through the European Parliament on Thursday. Although a majority of MEPs voted to reject the non-binding guidelines in favour of binding legislation, they failed to muster the absolute majority of MEPs required.

Parliament voted to reject the guidelines by 336 votes to 253 with 30 abstentions, but this was not enough as, under the rules, an absolute majority of all Members (369) was needed for rejection.

The guidelines cover "search and rescue situations and for disembarkation" in the context of operations on the EU's sea borders. They state that Member States fleets operating under FRONTEX must render assistance to persons in distress at sea, regardless of their nationality or status, or the circumstances in which that person is found.

The guidelines stipulate that FRONTEX agents should also take into account any requests for assistance, the situation of the ship and the presence of children, pregnant women and passengers in need of medical assistance.

Disembarkation procedures should be carried out in line with international law and existing bilateral agreements between Member States and third countries.

The European Parliament has repeatedly called for more parliamentary scrutiny over the FRONTEX external border agency's activities, as NGOs have criticised its procedures regarding migrants. Another proposal currently being examined by Parliament seeks to improve the training of FRONTEX agents in fundamental rights.

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