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## Policy paper

January 2019

### OUR VIEW

The problem with boat refugees is a constant challenge for companies operating in the central Mediterranean.

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Merchant ships should not be used for surveillance, and only assist in the case of an emergency, as they are not equipped for this type of rescue operation.

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It is important that the authorities quickly inform the vessel about a safe port to disembark the rescued persons

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There is a need to target the fight against traffickers



## Boat refugees

**Rescue operations in the Mediterranean should be the responsibility of the authorities, and not the merchant vessels.**

Refugees attempting to cross the central Mediterranean has increased since 2014. Danish shipping companies' vessels have in a number of cases been called upon to come to the assistance, and rescue distressed embarkations that have not been able to make the trip to Europe.

Danish ships are well aware of their moral and legal obligation to come to the res-

cue of distressed individuals. The merchant ships and their crews do, however, neither have the necessary equipment (extra food, blankets and medicines etc.), nor the expertise to handle large rescue operations with often hundreds of people in a state of profound distress. Furthermore, a traditional merchant vessel is not constructed to handle the rescue of a large number of people.

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### FACTS

- 119,000 people crossed the central Mediterranean in 2017, in comparison to more than 181,000 in 2016, around 152,000 in 2015 and around 166,000 in 2014. In 2014, Danish shipping companies took part in 12 rescue operations where 3,253 people were rescued.
- In 2015, Danish shipping companies took part in 13 rescue operations where 2,660 people were rescued.
- In 2016, Danish shipping companies took part in four rescue operations where 525 people were rescued.



Operation Triton 2018. Operation Triton supports Italy with border control, surveillance and search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean. Photo: Frontex

barkation of the refugees or the progress of the rescue operation. The coast guard should always quickly inform the captain of which port the rescued persons should be disembarked at, and may be handed over to the authorities. The responsible coast guard should also assist in maintaining safety on board and provide medical care, medicine and supplies such as food, water and blankets.

#### **EU efforts have made a difference**

It is very positive that the EU in 2015 tripled its resources to Triton and Poseidon operations led by the EU border and coast guard agency Frontex. This led to a decrease in the frequency of times, merchant ships have been asked to assist in rescue operations. The proportion of rescue operations, where merchant vessels have been involved, has dropped from 25 pct. in 2014 to 11 pct. in 2015 and eight pct. in 2016.

Therefore, it must be the authorities' task to ensure adequate search and rescue resources in the Mediterranean. In addition, merchant ships should not be used for monitoring tasks, and should only be asked to assist to the extent where the urgency of the situation demands it.

For this very reason, it is also clearly stipulated in the international conventions that the coastal state in question has an obligation to help with the disembarkation of the rescued people. The captain and the shipping company shall not be held responsible for the place of disembarkation.

Danish Shipping has supported EU's initiative to establish the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. It is important to ensure better coordination and more resources, including increased participation of national coast guards, as well as a doubling of the number of personnel. At the same time, it is important that the EU coast guards are present close to the North African littoral stretch and lead a determined effort against the traffickers, who send people off in unseaworthy boats.

- In 2017, Danish shipping companies took part in one rescue operations where 287 people were rescued.
- In 2018, Danish shipping companies took part in two rescue operations where 127 people were rescued.

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