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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations

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Subject: Mauritania  
- Commission's intention to enter into negotiation for a non-legally binding framework document on behalf of the EU to launch a migration partnership and dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

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Delegations will find attached a note from the European Commission.



Brussels, 26 January 2024

**NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT**

***SUBJECT:* Commission's intention to enter into negotiation for a non-legally binding framework document on behalf of the EU to launch a migration partnership and dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania**

***CONTACT POINTS:* European Commission, DG HOME, Unit A3**

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***Background***

The Atlantic migratory route to the Canary Islands has been registering a steady increase since 2020. In 2023, 40 400 people arrived irregularly, compared to 15 463 in 2022 (ISAA report). Mauritania is not a country of origin for the EU (the number of irregular arrivals of Mauritians in the EU is negligible: 33 in 2023 until 31 July, and 11 in 2022), but rather a country of transit and destination for regional and seasonal migrants, as well as for refugees from neighbouring countries. In the second half of December 2023 Mauritania was the main country of departure towards the Canary Islands, Recently, Mauritania issued warnings about its border situation in terms of capacity and resources to cope with an increased influx of refugees and migrants. The country is particularly worried about the impact of migration on its socio-economic stability and its security (notably as concerns the terrorist threat and transnational organised crime).

Mauritania is a strategic partner in terms of migration to reduce the irregular arrivals to the EU, and in terms of security. In the Sahel, which is experiencing increasing insecurity and instability, Mauritania, at this stage, is the only democratic country cooperating with the EU.

The existing cooperation with Mauritania on migration tends to be very good with both the EU and EU Member States. In September 2022, the Commission proposed Mauritania to strengthen cooperation on prevention of departures and border management by concluding a status agreement and/or a working arrangement with Frontex. After an initial expression of interest and four rounds of negotiations, Mauritania realised that the status agreement was politically too sensitive; Mauritania proposed instead a legally binding framework of cooperation with the EU on migration, encompassing all areas, along the lines of those that, according to Mauritania, had been

concluded with other transit countries. Mauritania's authorities expressed concern that the EU is not recognising Mauritania's efforts to help in reducing the irregular departures to the EU and supporting disembarkations, and that financial support is too limited, in particular when compared with other countries in the region. Mauritania's authorities also underlined that the country is using its limited capacities to prevent the departures in the interest of the EU instead of its national concerns in the areas of security and social protection, and that the situation is not sustainable.

In September 2023, the Spanish Presidency of the Council presented a working paper on Mauritania asking the Commission and EU Member States to boost the partnership with Mauritania. In Moadem meetings of 26 October and 29 November 2023, as well as in the EMWP of 6 October, the Commission informed EU Member States of the state of play. EU Member States expressed support for the establishment of a migration partnership and dialogue, in a Team Europe spirit.

Commissioner Johansson in her bilateral meeting with the Mauritanian Minister of Foreign Affairs in September and VP Schinas in his visit to Mauritania in October 2023 reassured Mauritania about EU's willingness to continue supporting the country and to further strengthen the partnership by launching a migration dialogue, possibly via a joint statement/declaration.

A meeting at senior officials' level on migration took place in Brussels on 11 December 2023, with the participation of several Member States (ES, FR, DE, BE and AT). Mauritania's authorities requested a framework document for a migration partnership and dialogue. They also stressed the need to urgently address some of its needs and to receive more financial support and an exchange on the timeline for engagement and support. The Commission clarified that the framework document could not be a legally binding one.

### ***The non-binding instrument***

Considering the above, the Commission is ready to negotiate a framework document (the EU will propose "Joint Declaration establishing a partnership on migration between the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the EU", which will need to be agreed with Mauritania), via a procedure for Non-Binding Instrument, along the lines of the Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility negotiated with Nigeria in 2015. The instrument would cover all migration areas and would aim to launch a regular migration dialogue, to be held once a year at senior official level and yearly or bi-yearly at political level, supplemented by technical/thematic meetings as necessary, covering all relevant aspects.

### ***Way forward***

In line with the "Arrangements for non-binding instruments" agreed by the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Union External Action Service in December 2017, the Commission, as negotiator, informs with this note the Council of its readiness to enter into negotiations with Mauritania with a view to launching a migration partnership and dialogue by means of a framework document (a Joint Declaration to be proposed). The Commission will inform the Council of the progress of the negotiations with regular updates. Once the negotiations are concluded, and before the signature of the non-binding instrument, the Commission will transmit the draft to the Council, with a view to obtaining the authorisation to sign.

The signature by the Commission of the negotiated documents is planned to be done at political level.

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