



Brussels, 9 March 2015
(OR. en)

6565/1/15
REV 1

LIMITE

**JAI 111
ASIM 12
FRONT 47
RELEX 162
COMIX 92**

NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations
Subject: Migratory pressures: trends and further actions

I. Introduction

To respond to the increased migratory pressure in the European Union, a number of political initiatives have been implemented. The existing working framework within the Council was established under the Italian Presidency with the adoption of the Conclusions on “Taking action to better manage migratory flows” on 10 October 2014, which built on the work done by the Task Force Mediterranean (TFM).

The aim of the said Council Conclusions was to ensure a structural approach going beyond the immediate emergency measures and to address possible future challenges in order to adjust to the specific needs presented by emerging situations.

The approach adopted by the Council is based on three pillars: cooperation with third countries with a focus on the combatting human smugglers and traffickers, the strengthening of Frontex capabilities and actions to fully implement the Common European Asylum system.

Since then, several measures have been taken in order to address the existing migratory challenges. In December 2014, the Commission presented an overview of the measures taken following the work of the TFM and the Council Conclusions of October 2014. It showed the progress made on certain aspects. Nevertheless, there is a lot of work still to be done. Regular, updated information from the Commission on the actions taken is a necessary tool in order to have a comprehensive overview.

Bearing in mind the forthcoming European Agenda on Migration, which will be presented by the Commission later this year, there is a need to consider what immediate actions can be taken to respond to the most acute issues.

II. Latest developments

The most recent exchange of views among Member States, the Commission and the relevant agencies has already identified some urgent issues and tendencies.

A. Issues concerning human smuggling and trafficking, in particular in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Region

Latest trends show that, specifically due to organised networks of smugglers and traffickers, the traditional seasonal decline in the number of arrivals is lower than expected. Some of the incidents involving large ships coming from Turkey received considerable media attention, notably around Christmas and the New Year.

However, these have not been isolated incidents, as this trend has already been observed previously. At this stage, it has been noticed that arrivals both in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean have been organised by using larger ships that bring greater financial benefit for smugglers and traffickers.

Both the Member States and the Commission have underlined the need for resolute action from the EU to fight the networks of smugglers.

The following have been envisaged as immediate measures to address this challenge:

- a) ***greater focus on law enforcement cooperation***, with a more efficient use of the existing means at the disposal of the EU and its Member States.
- b) ***enhancement of inter agency cooperation between Frontex, Europol and EASO, as well as with Member States on better information sharing***. The finalisation of the agreement between Frontex and Europol on processing of personal data has been indicated as an issue to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- c) ***improvement of efficient information exchange in order to provide a better situational picture***. Member States should transmit all relevant information to Frontex as provided for in the Eurosur Regulation.

B. Reinforcement of border management

To respond to the rising migration flows, Frontex launched operation Triton with the primary goal of ensuring effective border security at the southern EU borders. Originally intended to last only a few months, the operation has been extended until the end of the year. Triton has been a tangible expression of solidarity among Member States – considering the number of participating Member States and the assets provided.

While Triton has also contributed to saving lives in the Mediterranean, the EU has been criticised for doing too little in the region to prevent further tragedies, such as those which unfortunately occurred on 9 February 2015.

In response to the call for more involvement and enhanced EU action, further possibilities to increase EU support should be considered. This has led the Commission to make available to Italy €13.7 million of emergency funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) in addition to its national programmes in order to support the management of the high influx of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors.

C. Increased migratory pressure on the land borders in the Western Balkans Region

The number of migrants from Kosovo entering the territory of the Member States of the EU has dramatically increased in recent months. The Hungarian authorities have reported a high level of detections of Kosovar nationals since last December, amounting to one third of all detections at the EU external borders. This has had consequences for asylum systems in other Member States, most notably in Germany and Austria.

Instability at the Eastern borders of the EU in terms of possible emerging migration flows should be continuously monitored, in order to be ready to respond to the changing situation.

III. Measures to be taken to reduce the migratory pressure

The following measures have already been identified:

- a) ***reinforcement of the cooperation with third countries***. During the Italian Presidency, dialogues and processes with third countries were stepped up and widened, for example cooperation with Eastern Africa has been strengthened by launching the Khartoum process. More efforts are needed with regard to certain transit countries, in particular Turkey, Libya and its neighbouring countries, e.g. Egypt and Tunisia. In this framework, both JHA and other external policy instruments could be used.
- b) ***counter narrative in third countries***. False information has often been distributed via different channels on the benefits to be gained by moving to the EU. Accordingly, the EU and the Member States could take action to curb the level of expectations before they travel.
- c) ***effective return policy***. The swift return of migrants could serve as an example to counter the vain promises that migrants will see an immediate improvement in their lives in the EU.

IV. Issues for debate by Ministers

In light of the above and taking into account the measures outlined earlier, Ministers are invited to provide their views on the following questions:

- *How could Frontex activities be further strengthened?*

 - *What further specific measures could be taken to tackle the prevailing situation at southern sea borders and at the land borders in the Western Balkans?*
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