



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos following the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 25 February 2016

Brussels, 25 February 2016

Dear all,

First of all, let me thank the Dutch Presidency and my colleague Klaas Dijkhoff for today's very necessary and very constructive Council meeting.

In the next 10 days, we need tangible and clear results on the ground. Otherwise there is a risk that the whole system will completely break down.

We all have the responsibility to step up our efforts to apply the agreed European solutions. There is no time for uncoordinated actions.

During our lunch on Turkey with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, we agreed on coordinated measures to speed up the implementation of the EU-Turkey Action Plan. The next important step is the European Council on 7 March.

Let me also take this opportunity once again to welcome the NATO deal reached to fight migrant smuggling in the Aegean. I have been in constant contact with NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg, and am grateful for the excellent cooperation.

Today, we also discussed borders, and 2 important elements.

First, their better management: We had a good discussion on our proposal for a European Border and Coast Guard, and the Dutch Presidency is committed to reaching an agreement by the end of June.

I'm also working very closely with the European Parliament on the proposal and I have already met with the rapporteur to discuss the next steps.

Second, on their security: The Commission has made a proposal for systematic checks of everyone who crosses the external EU borders – including EU citizens.

I am glad that Member States are moving forward on this proposal, and I look forward to working with the Parliament so an agreement can be reached soon.

Moving to the pressing situation in our neighbourhood: the route along the Western Balkans. The situation is very critical. The possibility of a humanitarian crisis is very real and very near.

We cannot continue to deal through unilateral, bilateral or trilateral actions; the first negative effects and impacts are already visible.

We have a shared responsibility – all of us – towards our neighbouring states, both EU and non-EU, but also towards those desperate people.

We cannot continue with the wave-through policy – the European Council was crystal clear on this.

And we cannot put caps on how many asylum seekers we receive. This is simply not according to EU and international rules. I have reminded Member States today, that everyone must respect and apply the rules.

The Commission is working extremely hard on contingency planning, both within the EU and outside. UNHCR and IOM are strongly involved. The plan should be ready in the days to come.

But the contingency plan cannot replace our previous commitments:

- To apply the rules fully of the Common European Asylum System, Dublin, and also Schengen;
- To return back to the normal situation as soon as possible;
- To drastically speed up and start relocating massively in the course of the coming days – not tens, but hundreds.

We are monitoring the situation in Greece very closely. Greece has its obligations, but also needs our support to substantially increase reception capacities. IOM and UNHCR are ready to help.

We should never forget that it is human lives that are at stake.

To those who think that we need national solutions because a European approach is not working, I say: it is precisely national actions that are hindering a European approach. I have said it this morning, and I will repeat it again: Now is the moment to deliver. We have absolutely no time to lose.

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