



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the Press Conference after the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Home Affairs

Amsterdam, 25 January 2016

Dear all,

Firstly, let me welcome and thank the Dutch Presidency, my friends Ard and Klaas, for today's first and informal Justice and Home Affairs Council.

Discussions were concrete and constructive on both on migration and on security issues.

I think it's clear to everyone that Europe is at a turning point today.

Last year, more than a million people reached Europe's shore looking for protection.

More than 30,000 have already arrived by sea in 2016 so far, in only 3 weeks!

Important decisions were taken in September last year, and promises to implement were made, in line with European values of solidarity and responsibility.

But months later, we find ourselves with more internal border controls, questionable legislative decisions towards asylum seekers or refugees, less solidarity, less responsibility and more individual and uncoordinated decisions.

The Commission has always been here to support the countries in need, to coordinate actions, to offer the necessary know-how.

We have raised budgets, we have put forward legislative proposals to match the current crisis situation, we have organised meetings and acted as negotiators where Member States disagreed.

But this situation will not just resolve itself by staring at the documents and texts we agreed on, and by playing the chicken or the egg game.

It is time for ALL Member States to deliver on ALL commitments made.

Unless Member States fully deliver on their promises and respect the rules that are in place, we will not be able to tackle effectively the current challenges.

I cannot repeat it enough: The only solution to the refugee crisis is a European one.

What we need is the full implementation of the agreed measures:

- We need fully operational hotspots – all of them.
- We need to properly register everyone.
- We need to go full-speed ahead with relocation.
- We need more reception capacities in Greece and along the Western Balkans route.
- We need to return people that have no right to stay.
- We need to strengthen the control and management of our external borders.

I have stated since the beginning that Schengen is EU's biggest achievement and we need to protect it.

But in order for us to maintain free movement within our internal borders, we need to better manage our external borders.

The Commission has come forward with a very bold and much needed proposal for a new European Border and Coast Guard.

I am happy to see that the Presidency has also taken it up as a priority and is committed to moving ahead.

We need to quickly agree in order to address the challenges posed by the migratory crisis and the security threats at Europe's external borders.

And since we're talking about security in Europe, I would like to bring to your attention a few important points which we have discussed today.

In order to keep our citizens safe and reduce the terrorist threat, it is essential for the Member States to use the systems that are in place, I clearly underlined this point with Ministers today.

Databases like the Schengen Information System and Europol systems need to be fed and fully used.

In addition, these efforts need to go hand in hand with prevention and countering of extremism.

This morning we launched Europol's new European Counter Terrorism Centre, which will significantly reinforce information sharing and operational coordination between Member States, focusing in particular on foreign terrorist fighters, the trafficking of illegal firearms and terrorist financing.

The Commission proposed also new rules for firearms, and a Directive to criminalise terrorist travel, training and financing across the Union.

These are concrete measures that can make a difference.

We need to get them adopted as soon as possible.

We have taken concrete steps to deal with the radicalisation of our youth, with increased resources and a Centre of Excellence to share best practice at local level.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are running out of time and we cannot afford to continue at the current pace.

A concerted effort is needed in order to help people in need, to protect our external borders, to eliminate the terrorist threat and to keep EU citizens safe.

I will be very frank with you: This year has not started easy, and I am not optimistic.

But I am no defeatist either, and neither is the Commission. I would like to remind everyone here today that we all have a responsibility towards our citizens, towards our fellow Member States, towards our neighbouring partner countries, but also towards those vulnerable people seeking protection.

Let me also add that we count equally on our partners outside Europe to address the crisis.

It is not only a European refugee crisis. It is a global one.

I am looking forward to working hard with everyone here today in the coming months both in terms of delivering measures on the ground and the legislative processes in Brussels.

I remain confident that all Member States, together with the Dutch Presidency, the Commission and the Parliament will work together to find common solutions.

We simply have to.

Thank you

SPEECH/16/161