

European Council conclusions on migration, 20 October 2016

I. MIGRATION

1. The European Council took stock of the latest developments concerning the EU's comprehensive migration policy, highlighting the importance of implementation. The debate focused in particular on the external dimension.

Protecting the external borders

2. The entry into force of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation on 6 October and national efforts are important steps in strengthening control of our external borders and getting 'back to Schengen' by adjusting the temporary internal border controls to reflect the current needs. Member States are now deploying staff and equipment to the European Border and Coast Guard, so as to reach full capacity for rapid reaction and returns by the end of the year.

3. The European Council calls for a swift adoption of the revised Schengen Borders Code enforcing systematic controls on all travellers crossing EU external borders and calls on the Council to establish its position on an entry/exit system before the end of 2016. It looks forward to the forthcoming Commission proposal for setting up a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), to allow for advance security checks on visa-exempt travellers and deny them entry where necessary.

Tackling migratory flows

(a) Preventing illegal migration along the Central Mediterranean route

4. More efforts are needed to stem the flows of irregular migrants, in particular from Africa, and to improve return rates. Recognising the significant contribution, including of financial nature, made by the frontline Member States in recent years, the European Council:

- recalls the importance of continuing to work towards the implementation of a Partnership Framework of cooperation with individual countries of origin or transit, with an initial focus on Africa. Its objective is to pursue specific and measurable results in terms of preventing illegal migration and returning irregular migrants, as well as to create and apply the necessary leverage, by using all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools, including development and trade;
- recalls the need to tackle the root causes of migration in the region, including by supporting displaced persons in the region, thus helping to prevent illegal migration, and underlines the contribution of the Valletta Action Plan and the proposed External Investment Plan in this context. It welcomes the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and calls on all global actors to shoulder their responsibilities in this respect;
- takes note of the Commission's "First progress report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration";
- calls on the High Representative, including in her role as Vice-President of the Commission, to present at the December European Council meeting progress with the five selected African countries and the first results achieved in terms of arrivals and returns. It will set orientations for further work on compacts and consider extending the approach to other countries;
- invites all actors to continue close cooperation on the compacts with a view to intensifying operational delivery, and Member States to reinforce national administrative processes for returns.

(b) Maintaining and tightening control of the Eastern Mediterranean route

5. A lasting stabilisation of the situation on the Eastern Mediterranean route requires the further implementation of the EU-Turkey statement and continued support for countries along the Western Balkans route. The European Council calls for:

- further efforts to accelerate returns from the Greek islands to Turkey, in line with the EU-Turkey statement, in particular by enhancing the efficiency and speed of asylum procedures;
- the rapid appointment of permanent coordinators in the Greek hotspots;
- Member States to respond in full to the calls for resources identified by the relevant EU agencies as being necessary to assist Greece;
- further progress on the full range of commitments vis-à-vis all Member States contained in the EU-Turkey statement, including as regards visa liberalisation. Co-legislators are invited to reach agreement within the next few weeks on the revision of the suspension mechanism applied to visas.

6. The European Council welcomes the progress made on developing compacts with Lebanon and Jordan to enhance support for refugees and host communities in both countries, and the signing of the "EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues" on 2 October to tackle challenges linked to irregular migration and improve practical cooperation on returns, readmission and reintegration.

(c) Remaining vigilant about other routes

7. The EU will continue cooperation with other countries and closely monitor flows along other migration routes, including the Western Mediterranean, so as to be able to rapidly react to developments.

Addressing other elements of the comprehensive strategy

8. The European Council calls upon:

- EASO to ensure that the asylum intervention pool becomes operational as soon as possible to support at any time and in sufficient numbers frontline Member States. To that effect, Member States will communicate as soon as possible the necessary experts to EASO and EASO will complement Member States' efforts by providing the necessary training and by contracting as required additional experts or services, with the support of the Commission;
- Member States to further intensify their efforts to accelerate relocation, in particular for unaccompanied minors, and existing resettlement schemes¹;
- the Council to agree before the end of the year on its position on the External Investment Plan, which is aimed at boosting investments and job creation in partner countries, with a view to swift agreement with the European Parliament in the first half of 2017.

9. The European Council also calls for work to be continued on the reform of the Common European Asylum System, including on how to apply the principles of responsibility and solidarity in the future. The European Council will revert to the issue in December.

¹ This is without prejudice to the position of Hungary and Slovakia, as contained in the Court proceedings launched relating to Council Decision n°2015/1601, and to the position of Poland, which has intervened in support of the applicants.

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