



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos following the informal Justice and Home Affairs Council in Valletta

Valletta, 26 January 2017

Dear friends,

I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank the Maltese Presidency, and my friend and colleague Carmelo Abela, for their excellent work in organising this first informal meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers here in Valletta.

I am glad to see that the Maltese Presidency and the European Commission agree on the most important priorities for our work on migration, border and security for the next 6 months.

We have engaged in constructive discussions with the Ministers of interior. I'm glad that today we have reached a common understanding on many points and that our joint work is progressing.

The reform of the Common European Asylum System needs to be put in the broader context of a better management of all aspects of migration, including:

- strengthening the control of our external borders;
- putting in place a credible return policy;
- and reinforcing our cooperation with third-countries.

We have seen that our joint efforts can achieve tangible results. The EU-Turkey statement has drastically reduced the number of migrants arriving in Greece from Turkey.

We now have to also reduce the number of crossings on the central Mediterranean route.

As announced yesterday, we will step-up our efforts to fight smugglers and traffickers and most importantly to prevent the loss of life at sea along this route, in particular with and around Libya.

I believe that today's discussion has created a better understanding that we need to achieve true European solidarity in our migration management. I hope that we will be able to come to an agreement during the Maltese Presidency on how the future European Asylum System should work.

I encourage the Maltese presidency to pursue their efforts to find a compromise suitable for all Member States on a solidarity mechanism that will be predictable and that will guarantee that no Member State is left alone. Carmelo knows that he can count on the Commission's full support to bring the discussion forward.

As part of our comprehensive approach, we also need to improve the management and security of our external borders, which contributes to an overall better security inside the EU.

The recent attack in Berlin has demonstrated once again the importance of linking existing and future EU information systems for border control and law enforcement purposes. Information must be available when it's needed and where it's needed.

I am pleased to see that the Council is making progress on our proposals for an Entry-Exit System (EES), and for a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). I have called on the Ministers today to find an agreement on these proposals with the European Parliament as soon as possible, so that the development of these systems could start still this year.

I also presented to the Ministers our new legislative proposals to substantially enhance the Schengen Information System (SIS). This system is our most widely used information sharing system for border management and security.

The changes will make the system more valuable for border and law enforcement authorities, including for the enforcement of returns.

All these systems must be better connected in the future, and this is what we are working on right now.

So to conclude: we had a very fruitful informal Justice and Home Affairs Council.

I look forward to continue working closely together with Carmelo and the Maltese Presidency to move forward on all these issues in the coming 6 months.

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