



Central Mediterranean Route: Commission proposes Action Plan to support Italy, reduce pressure and increase solidarity

Strasbourg, 4 July 2017

With the situation becoming ever more pressing along the Central Mediterranean Route, the Commission is today setting out a series of immediate measures that can be taken by the EU Member States, the Commission and EU Agencies, and Italy itself.

Building on the work of the past two years to save lives at sea and manage the increasing numbers of arrivals along the Central Mediterranean Route, all actors now need to intensify and accelerate their efforts in line with the increasing urgency of the situation and the commitments undertaken by EU leaders. Today's measures should form the basis of discussions at the informal Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting in Tallinn on Thursday.

European Commission President Jean-Claude **Juncker** said: *"The dire situation in the Mediterranean is neither a new nor a passing reality. We have made enormous progress over the past two and half years towards a genuine EU migration policy but the urgency of the situation now requires us to seriously accelerate our collective work and not leave Italy on its own. The focus of our efforts has to be on solidarity – with those fleeing war and persecution and with our Member States under the most pressure. At the same time, we need to act, in support of Libya, to fight smugglers and enhance border control to reduce the number of people taking hazardous journeys to Europe."*

Actions to support Italy and reduce flows

The European Commission proposes a set of measures to be taken now to accelerate the European Union's collective work along the Central Mediterranean Route, including notably that:

The Commission will:

- Further enhance the capacity of the **Libyan authorities** through a €46 million project prepared jointly with Italy;
- Support the establishment of a fully operational Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre in Libya;
- **Step up funding** for migration management in Italy, with an additional €35 million ready to be mobilised immediately;
- Ensure a **full mobilisation of EU Agencies**: the European Asylum and Support Office (EASO) is ready to increase the number of mobile teams supporting processing of applications; the European Border and Coast Guard Agency should urgently examine Italy's proposals regarding Joint Operation Triton; and the European Border and Coast Guard's rapid reaction pool of over 500 return experts is ready to be deployed at Italy's request;
- Launch and finance a **new resettlement pledging exercise**, notably from Libya, Egypt, Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan in conjunction with the UNHCR starting today;
- Work with Libya to strengthen **controls at the southern border**, in cooperation with G5 Sahel countries and Member States with the backing of EU financial support;
- Step up work to secure **readmission agreements** (or equivalent informal arrangements) with countries of origin and transit, with the support of Member States;
- Engage further with **Niger and Mali** under the Partnership Framework to prevent movements towards Libya;
- Continue to work with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to accelerate **Assisted Voluntary Returns from Libya and Niger** to countries of origin, including by providing additional funding;
- Ensure with Member States a full implementation of the **Partnership Framework**, including beyond the original 5 priority countries, using both positive and negative leverages;
- Further to the €200 million mobilised in 2017 for the North Africa window of the **EU-Africa Trust Fund, ensure equivalent funding for 2018 and beyond** from the EU budget and Member

States (see [table](#));

Member States should:

- Contribute much more substantially to the **EU-Africa Trust Fund**, to complement the €2.6 billion contribution from the EU's limited budget, in line with their commitments dating back to November 2015 (see [table](#));
- Accelerate **relocation** from Italy by responding more quickly to Italian requests, increasing pledges and pledging more regularly;
- Help **engage with Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria**, alongside the Commission and the European External Action Service, to encourage them to join the Seahorse Mediterranean Network, and call on Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to declare their search and rescue areas and establish a formal Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre;
- Accelerate discussions, in conjunction with the European Parliament, on the **reform of the Dublin system** for allocating asylum applications within the EU to provide a more stable framework for tackling these challenges in the future;
- Mobilise their capabilities, alongside those of the European Border and Coast Guard, to **support the return of irregular migrants** from Italy;

Italy should:

- Draft, in consultation with the Commission and on the basis of a dialogue with NGOs, a **Code of Conduct for NGOs** carrying out search and rescue activities in the Mediterranean;
- Fulfil its own commitments on **relocation** by: registering, as a matter of urgency, all Eritreans present in Italy; centralising and standardising the relocation procedure; enabling the relocation of unaccompanied minors; and showing greater flexibility on security checks arranged bilaterally with other Member States;
- **Implement rapidly the Minniti law**, including by: creating additional hotspot capacity; increasing reception capacity and substantially increasing detention capacity to reach at least 3,000 urgently; increasing the maximum period of detention in line with EU law; and significantly speeding up the examination of asylum applications at the appeal stage;
- **Step up returns** by: applying expedited return procedures; making wider use of the rapid procedures and inadmissibility grounds; developing a national list of safe countries of origin; issuing return decisions alongside and together with asylum decisions; considering the use of residence restrictions; and refraining from providing travel documents to asylum seekers.

See the full Commission Action Plan [here](#).

Next steps

The Commission is working in concert with the Estonian presidency of the Council and the measures presented today should form the basis of discussions on immediate support for Italy that will take place at the informal Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting in Tallinn on Thursday.

Background

The European Union and its Member States have progressively laid out a stronger and more articulated policy response to save lives and better manage migratory flows in the Central Mediterranean (see [here](#)).

But the loss of life and continuing migratory flows of primarily economic migrants on the Central Mediterranean route is a structural challenge and remains an issue of urgent and serious concern.

At the European Council of 22-23 June 2017, leaders [committed](#) to act decisively now "*by stepping up coordination and delivery on all the elements contained in the Malta Declaration, the Partnership Framework and the Joint Valletta Action Plan, underpinned by sufficient financial resources.*"

The Commission is today following up by identifying specific actions each actor can and should take to make good on those commitments.

Italy has already been taking important steps to support cooperation with Libya on migration management and to further improve the implementation of the EU migration policy within Italy. The recent *Minniti law* has the objective of making the Italian asylum and return system much more effective than today, identifying quickly those in need of protection, while taking actions that can facilitate the swift return of economic migrants.

For more information

[Commission Action Plan](#)

[Factsheet: Central Mediterranean Route: Commission Action Plan to support Italy and stem flows](#)

[Factsheet: EU and Member State contributions to the EU-Africa Trust Fund](#)

[January 2017 Communication: Migration on the Central Mediterranean route: Managing flows, saving lives](#)

ANNEX: EUROPEAN COMMISSION ACTION PLAN ON MEASURES IN SUPPORT OF ITALY AND TO REDUCE PRESSURE ALONG THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE AND INCREASE SOLIDARITY

The loss of life and continuing migratory flows of primarily economic migrants on the Central Mediterranean route is a structural challenge and remains an issue of urgent and serious concern not only for Europe but also the African continent as a whole. On 30 June, the Italian Minister of Interior, Marco Minniti, addressed a letter to the President of the Council of Ministers, the Estonian Interior Minister Andres Anvelt and to the Commissioner for Home Affairs and Migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos, warning that the situation in Italy would soon no longer be sustainable. The issue of migration in the Central Mediterranean will be on the agenda of the informal meeting of the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs of 6 and 7 July. This is the Commission's contribution for the discussion at that meeting and does not exclude further actions in light of the outcome of the discussions and developments on the ground.

I. Measures to reduce migratory pressure along the Central Mediterranean Route and increase solidarity

- Better coordination of Search and Rescue activities (SAR) in the Central Mediterranean:
Italy should draft, in consultation with the Commission and on the basis of a dialogue with the NGOs, a Code of Conduct for NGOs involved in SAR activities. The Council could possibly endorse such Code of Conduct; Better cooperation between the Italian Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre (MRCC) and neighbouring MRCCs where established or other kinds of operational cooperation to ensure timely and effective intervention; The European Border and Coast Guard Agency to urgently examine Italy's proposals regarding Joint Operation Triton. North African partners, notably Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, should be encouraged to formally notify their SAR areas and establish MRCCs. To this end, Italy should swiftly implement the ongoing feasibility study of the Italian Coast Guard regarding the Libyan SAR capacity with a view to accelerating the establishment of a fully operational MRCC in Libya as this would allow Libya to take over responsibility for the organisation/coordination of a significantly higher number of SAR operations than is the case today. Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria should be encouraged to join the Seahorse Mediterranean Network.
- Step up actions to enhance the capacity of the Libyans to control borders:
The ongoing training activities of the Libyan Coast Guard need to be stepped up further and the prioritisation exercise of equipment and maintenance needs to be concluded with the Libyan authorities; The Board of the EU Trust Fund should adopt by the end of July the project on sea and land border management in Libya prepared by Italy jointly with the Commission, for an amount of EUR 46 million.
- Reinforce actions to reduce migratory pressure on Libya and fight smuggling and human trafficking:
The information exchange between the relevant Common Security and Defence Policy missions and the European Border and Coast Guard and Europol should be enhanced and this explicitly foreseen in the revised mandate; Assisted Voluntary Returns from Libya and Niger to countries of origin through a joint-initiative with IOM should be accelerated with further funds available, if needed; The Commission will launch a new resettlement pledging exercise in conjunction with the UNHCR starting with those in need of international protection from Libya, Egypt, Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan; The EU and Member States will step up their engagement with Niger and Mali to prevent movements towards Libya; The EU and Member States should work with Libya to significantly and rapidly strengthen border controls at the external borders of Libya (particularly the southern ones) to stem further flows into Libya. This includes enhanced cooperation with G5 Sahel countries and the establishment, with EU financial support of EUR 50 million, of the "Joint Force" decided at the last G5 Summit, which aims at reinstating control at borders in the transit areas of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The EU and Member States should step up implementation of the Partnership Frameworks, including beyond the five current partnership countries, using both positive and negative levers, notably for the main countries of origin, including the use of visa leverage as appropriate.
- Achieve real progress in the return of irregular migrants *The EU should:* put in place with the full support of Member States well-functioning EU readmission agreements and practical arrangements with third countries without further delay and using all possible levers and incentives; fully mobilise the capabilities of the Member States as well as the European Border and Coast Guard at the request of Italy to support the returns of irregular migrants, notably through the deployment of European return intervention teams from the available pools and the organisation of return operations, covering both charter and commercial flights. *Italy should:* apply expedited return

procedures; issue immediately together with the asylum decision return decisions for certain categories of rejected asylum applicants; increase the use of the Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration procedures together with IOM.

- Deliver in full the existing relocation commitments Member States need to step up relocations from Italy, showing more flexibility in accepting the applicants Italy proposed for relocation, responding more quickly to Italian requests, increasing their pledges and pledging more regularly. Italy should register as a matter of urgency all Eritreans present in Italy, centralise the relocation procedure to dedicated relocation hubs, and standardise the procedure to enable relocation of unaccompanied minors. Furthermore Italy should remain flexible and agree with certain Member States bilateral arrangements for additional security checks. Italy should facilitate the implementation of the EASO reach-out campaign to identify and register for relocation all potential applicants that arrived in 2016 and 2017 that are still in Italy.
- Member States should urgently provide additional funding for the EU Trust Fund and in particular its North Africa Window to ensure its sustainability for 2018 and beyond, in line with their stated commitments. For its part, the EU mobilised an additional EUR 200 million for 2017, which will soon all be allocated and contracted. The EU is now actively identifying further funding for 2018 from the EU budget.

II. Stepping up implementation of EU migration policy with Italy

In addition to measures to improve the management of flows along the central Mediterranean route, there are actions that can be taken to improve the implementation of EU migration policy in Italy. The recent *Minniti law* has the objective of making the Italian asylum and return system much more effective than today, identifying quickly those in need of protection, while taking actions that can facilitate the swift return of economic migrants who represent the vast majority of migrants arriving to and present in Italy.

- Italy should step-up the full implementation of the *Minniti law, including:*
Substantial increase of existing capacity of stationary hotspots (the current 1,600 places should, at least, be doubled). Additional hotspots capacity, should also facilitate securing 100% identification, registration and fingerprinting of all migrants. This would allow disembarkation, initial screening and channelling via the asylum or return procedure to take place primarily in the hotspots (screening of applicants and channelling). Sufficient terminals for Eurodac, the Visa Information System and the Automated Fingerprint Identification System need to be present in each hotspot. The overall structural reception capacity needs to be significantly increased. Detention capacity to be substantially increased to reach urgently at least 3,000. In line with the Commission's Recommendation on the implementation of the Return Directive, prolong the current maximum duration of detention by making full use of the period allowed under EU legislation. Ensure sufficient capacity of judicial authorities and significantly speed up the examination of applications at both first instance and the appeal stage.
- EU to step up funding for migration management in Italy As a short-term action, an initial additional EUR 35 million could be mobilised immediately to support the implementation of the *Minniti reforms*.
- In addition, Italy should take the following steps
Use rapid procedures, whereby the application is examined while the applicant is kept in closed centres, to prevent migrants absconding and to facilitate the return of those with inadmissible or manifestly unfounded claims. Make wider use of inadmissibility grounds possible in appropriate cases, notably to declare applications inadmissible based on first country of asylum/ safe third country concepts and make wider use of accelerated procedures, notably when an applicant comes from a 'safe country of origin', or misled the authorities. Give consideration to developing a national list of 'safe countries of origin', prioritising the inclusion of the most common countries-of-origin of migrants arriving in Italy. To give European coverage, Council conclusions identifying safe countries of origin could be beneficial. Use residence/free movement restrictions and avoid providing travel documents to asylum seekers to prevent secondary movements, except for 'serious humanitarian reasons' where appropriate.
- Further EASO support should be made available for the additional actions, in particular for the use of rapid procedures.

III. Towards a sustainable crisis management

To put the arrangements for handling crisis situations on a firmer footing, it is imperative that the European Parliament and the Council make progress on the negotiations on the Dublin proposal as a matter of urgency. A reformed Dublin system as part of a comprehensive approach, including the kind of measures outlined in this note, hold the solution for showing solidarity to Italy and other Member

States under pressure while clarifying responsibilities.

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