



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos following the Ministerial Conference on the Central Mediterranean Migration Route in Rome

Rome, 20 March 2017

Dear all,

I would first like to thank Minister Minniti, for organising this very timely and much needed conference on the Central Mediterranean Migration Route. The challenges that we face are not European or North African – they are global and shared.

Migratory flows to Italy continue to increase – the number of arrivals from January until now this year are 50% higher compared to the same period last year. This is of common interest to all: European and North African countries, both sides of the Mediterranean.

This is why it is so essential that we all work together and directly with one another. And we decided to meet again in a few months on the other side of the Mediterranean (probably in Tunisia).

This Ministerial conference builds on our efforts announced in January under the Central Mediterranean Communication, as well as the Malta Implementation Plan prepared by the Maltese Presidency. The Commission is working hard to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation between the North African and European countries in tackling the migration flows in the Central Mediterranean Route.

We cannot leave either Italy or Libya alone.

Today the European Commission has awarded €12.2 million in emergency funding to Italy under the Internal Security Fund. The funding will be provided to the Italian Coast Guard to implement a specific operational framework for border surveillance and to safeguard human life at sea.

I warmly welcome the outcome reflected in the declaration of the Conference – it clearly demonstrates everyone's readiness to work together.

Stabilising Libya is of course key. We have been actively working to make available around €200 million in financial support for the Central Mediterranean Route. From this amount around €90 million should be allocated to Libya.

We are also providing technical support to the Libyan Coast Guard through the Seahorse Programme and Operation Sophia to fight migrant smugglers and save lives. Tunisian, Algerian and Egyptian coastguard authorities should also join the Seahorse programme with Libya to help us break the smugglers' business model.

At the same time, we are ready to finance the work of IOM and UNHCR to take care of the migrants and refugees stranded in Libya.

Today we build on the strong historical, cultural and geographical ties between Europe and North Africa.

We are all in this together.

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