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From:	Incoming Slovenian Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Discussion paper on the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration – focus on FRONTEX activities

A successful voluntary and forced return policy at EU level is a crucial element of comprehensive migration management. However, over the last few years, figures for third-country nationals effectively returned to their country of origin have remained low. To respond to this trend, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum puts a strong emphasis on the ‘humane, effective return, readmission and reintegration of those not eligible to stay in the EU’. It reaffirms that this is a common challenge for the EU and for its partners. Much can therefore be done by ensuring more strategic cooperation with crucial third countries of origin and transit. At the same time, stronger internal structures and improved procedures, both at EU and national level, could help overcome fragmentation of (national) approaches and lead to closer cooperation between Member States and all other relevant stakeholders. Both aspects are necessary in order to achieve and foster an effective, common EU system for returns.

The EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration supports the abovementioned goals. Among other things, it emphasises the need for a common EU system for returns. It aims to develop a more uniform and coordinated approach among Member States to unlock the full potential of voluntary return and reintegration, which should contribute to overcoming the existing gaps and could lead to a more sustainable return policy for the mutual benefit of the returnees, the EU and third countries. It emphasises that a sustainable return policy requires common endeavours by all partners involved.

This goes hand in hand with the concept of shared responsibility, which alongside the Member States' obligations, calls for strong engagement by the EU and its agencies in the implementation of the policy. New/additional activities planned as future steps in the strategy therefore require commitment and implementation by all - Member States, the Commission and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

Frontex, particularly through its enhanced mandate, is a key player in ensuring effective implementation of this strategy. Frontex should, inter alia, support Member States in increasing the number of voluntary return operations and reinforce its capacities to provide operational assistance to Member States in all phases of the voluntary return and reintegration process, including pre-return counselling, post-arrival support and monitoring of reintegration assistance.

At the same time, in order for the strategy to be fully implemented and bring about sustainable results, the Member States themselves will need to invest additional efforts.

The contribution of Member States is especially vital in overcoming the existing fragmentation of approaches towards data collection, return counselling and return and reintegration programmes. It is also up to Member States to improve coordination and enhance capacities related to voluntary return and reintegration.

The identification of common goals, as put forward by the strategy, was the first step in the process of developing an efficient system for the voluntary return and reintegration of irregular migrants. Now, the next step is to further discuss the concrete requirements and expectations of relevant stakeholders and the methods of coordination to implement the tools identified by the strategy and achieve the envisaged objectives.

For this purpose, at the forthcoming Working Party on Integration, Migration and Expulsion (IMEX) meeting on 6 July 2021, delegations are invited to share their views on the following questions:

- 1. In relation to the measures proposed in the strategy to reinforce voluntary returns and reintegration, what do Member States regard as priority activities to be implemented?**
 - 2. What are the Member States' expectations from Frontex as one of the main actors in the implementation of the strategy? Which activities do Member States regard as priorities in this regard?**
 - 3. How can Member States best contribute to the successful implementation of the strategy steps related to Frontex activities?**
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