

To  
Ministers of the Interior and Migration  
along the  
Eastern Mediterranean Route /  
Western Balkan Route and partners

Ms Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home  
Affairs

Mr Olivér Várhelyi, Commissioner for  
Neighbourhood and Enlargement

Mr Fabrice Leggeri, Executive Director of  
FRONTEX

Ms Nina Gregori, Executive Director of  
European Union Agency for Asylum

Mr Michael Spindelegger, Director General  
of ICMPD

Mr António Vitorino, Director General of  
IOM

26. January 2022

Dear Ministers, Commissioners, Directors, Distinguished Colleagues,

In the “Vienna Declaration” on effectively combating irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Route, adopted in July 2020, all partners agreed to establish a coordination structure making best use of all existing systems to better match strategic priorities, needs

and actions along the route, and building on a pro-active, permanent and structured whole-of-route approach.

The Joint Coordination Platform (JCP) successfully kicked off in Vienna one year ago. Since then, cooperation has been further strengthened, especially at the Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference in Prague on 23-24 June 2021, where Political Guidelines for the Joint Coordination Platform on effectively combating irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Route were enshrined in a Joint Ministerial Declaration.

At the Salzburg Forum Ministerial Conference, hosted by the Hungarian Chairmanship on 14 December 2021, discussions focused on the JCP's future direction, and a Joint Declaration was adopted.

In the meantime, the JCP has successfully established contacts with EU and Schengen partners, the European Commission, EU agencies and a number of international organisations. It has also already provided assistance to its partners along the route, involving all elements specified in its mandate (placing a special emphasis on cooperation in the field of returns).

As contacts with our partners have shown, adequate support and attention are very relevant for all transit and destination countries facing migratory flows, and during all stages of the return process – ranging from ensuring proper procedures and legal remedies to return counselling and return preparation through to finally conducting return operations in line with international standards and offering post arrival support.

With a view to finding common solutions to these challenges, I have the pleasure of inviting you to the **“JCP Ministerial Return Conference – Regional Return Mechanism, Return Partnerships”** to be held in Vienna on 21/22 February 2022.

In the spirit of Integrated Border Management, the Conference will place a focus on fostering returns from the Western Balkan region as an essential element of migration management – a goal to be achieved by promoting international cooperation and by sharing needs and best practices. Building on that, other key elements are the promotion

of partnerships and reaching an agreement on core elements of a return mechanism that will enable translation of these results into operational actions.

Therefore, in order to foster discussion and exchange, it is my pleasure to invite you to attend a joint lunch on 21 February 2022 to be followed by working sessions on regional as well as national aspects of return, and a reception in the evening.

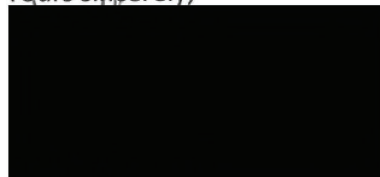
On 22 February, we will continue with working sessions aimed at defining core elements of both a regional return mechanism and return partnerships. After the morning sessions, I look forward to an exchange of views during the joint lunch, which will conclude our meeting (see draft agenda attached).

As regards the program, allow me to add that we are, of course, aware of the current quite volatile COVID-19 situation. Be assured that we are closely monitoring the developments and that we will take any necessary measures to ensure participants' safety and well-being.

For content-related questions, please feel free to contact the Department for International Affairs ([REDACTED]). For matters regarding the organisation of the event, please contact our Protocol Department ([REDACTED]).

Looking forward to welcoming you to Vienna for the **"JCP Ministerial Return Conference – Regional Return Mechanism, Return Partnerships"** on 21-22 February 2022, I remain

Yours sincerely,



Gerhard Karner

