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NOTE

From: Romanian delegation
To: Council

Subject: Ministerial Forum for Member States of the Schengen area with external
land borders
– Joint statement

Delegations will find attached the joint statement adopted by the Ministerial Forum for Member States of the Schengen area with external land borders.



MINISTERIAL FORUM FOR MEMBER STATES OF THE SCHENGEN AREA WITH EXTERNAL LAND BORDERS

JOINT STATEMENT

WE, the Home Affairs Ministers of Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, in the framework of the Ministerial Forum for Member States of the Schengen Area with External Land Borders (“the Forum”), established on 13 September 2013, upon the joint initiative of Finland and Poland, in Lappeenranta, Finland,

Gathered on 9 May 2023, via videoconference, upon the invitation of the Romanian Presidency of the Forum,

Having in mind that recent migratory crises and ongoing security challenges in the EU neighbourhood translate into threats in the field of internal security, management of external borders migration, and return, both at national and Union level,

Stressing the need to swiftly and appropriately address the challenges we are facing and to further develop our capabilities to cope with various provocations that may occur at the external land borders,

Pointing out the particular circumstances of the Member States with external land borders,

Recognising that the European integrated border management (EIBM) is a shared responsibility and taking note of the Multiannual strategic policy for EIBM adopted by the Commission,

Highlighting the supporting role of relevant EU Agencies (i.e. Frontex, Europol, EUAA, eu-LISA) and the importance of improved cooperation both between Member States and these Agencies and also between the EU Agencies themselves in order to increase prevention of illegal immigration, fight against cross-border crime and effectiveness of returns, in full compliance with fundamental rights,

Noting that progress has been made in the countries of origin to resolve the underlying problems leading to mass migration and instrumentalisation of migrants, however, efforts in this area should be further intensified and strengthened to ensure sustainable and long-lasting cooperation,

A close dialogue with relevant third countries would help to reduce the migratory pressure and to identify practical solutions to eliminate the factors generating this phenomenon. The 2022 EU Action Plan demonstrates the special attention paid to the Western Balkans region and that particular assistance to third countries in the EU neighbourhood is needed.

Awaiting for the evaluation of European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) Regulation and stressing the need to have more information on the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) planned by the Commission,

HAVE CONCLUDED THAT

1. Together, we cooperate and collaborate in order to accomplish common goals and objectives - safe, secure, and well-functioning EU external borders.
2. Specific needs of the Member States with external borders, in particular those with external land borders, deserve a special attention at EU level, as those Member States cope with various persisting and emerging challenges.
3. Frontex Technical and Operational Strategy should offer sufficient flexibility for national IBM strategies to set priorities, objectives, actions, and timetables tailored on the individual particularities and needs of the Member States, for enhancing reaction capabilities and an improved common response to the challenges at the external land borders, including returns.
4. The ongoing evaluation of the EBCG Regulation and the review of the standing corps carried out in close cooperation with the Member States should take into consideration the current operational needs, as well as the consequences on the national capabilities of the Member States.
5. In line with its core task, Frontex shall provide the necessary support to Member States with external borders and ensure the necessary resources and capabilities for protecting the external land borders - depending on their demand.
6. In implementing whole-of-the-route approach, EU should step up the close dialogue with the relevant third countries in order to continue to identify practical solutions to deter illegal migration and to reduce migratory pressure e.g. the European External Action Service and Frontex should enhance cooperation with third countries of origin and transit to facilitate returns and the 20 operational measures EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans should be implemented without delay (including the assistance package planned to be rolled out in 2023 and the financial support for the Member States who bilaterally support Member States and Western Balkan partners in their border management activities).

7. Effective control of EU's external borders requires legal, financial, operational and technical measures. We welcome the progress made on relevant legislative files, however, further efforts are needed to swiftly return to the normal functioning of the Schengen Area, as well as to achieve progress concerning countering instrumentalization of migrants for political purposes, including measures against transport operators engaged in or facilitating migrant smuggling and human trafficking.
8. EU external border protection could be further strengthened by means of setting common minimum standards for external border surveillance. This would help to ensure uniform high level of surveillance along all the external land borders.
9. The implementation of the key aspects of the EIBM and the national IBM strategies (capabilities, all types of mobile and stationary infrastructure, equipment, human resources) should be ensured by providing substantial EU financing to all Member States, including with regard to the implementation of IT systems in the field of migration and border management and of new technologies at the EU external land borders. Being aware of the obligation to ensure the highest possible level of protection of the external border of the Schengen area, we agree that physical infrastructure as an effective means of protection supporting the activities of border services, especially in the situation of instrumentalisation of migration. Therefore we encourage EU to look for a solution to finance physical infrastructure (including physical barriers) from EU Funds.
10. The Forum may be extended to new Member States after their consultation and consent upon membership.
11. The next Ministerial meeting of the Forum will be organised in 2024 by Slovakia.