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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum
Subject:	Cooperation with third countries in the area of migration – Role of strategic and comprehensive partnerships - Discussion paper

Context and Strategic Framework

The EU approach to international partnerships has evolved significantly over the past decade, with a marked shift towards more comprehensive engagement, embedding migration, following the 2015-2016 migration crisis. The Pact on Migration and Asylum, which entered into force on 11 June 2024, has further embedded migration partnerships within a broader external relations framework¹. These partnerships aim to address multiple dimensions of migration management in a comprehensive manner, including preventing irregular migration, ensuring protection, combating smuggling networks, facilitating returns and readmission, and promoting and developing legal pathways for migration.

¹ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

According to the Polish Presidency, Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships (SCPs) represent a cornerstone, among others, operationalising the external dimension of migration of the Pact. As such they will also be addressed in the first European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, on which the European Commission is currently consulting Member States, and which should be published by 12 December 2025. Moreover, a further reflection on the external EU funding and programmes underpinning these partnerships should take place in the coming months, as the Commission is expected to present the first draft of the new European Multiannual Financial Framework in July 2025. These topics are regularly discussed in the External Migration Working Party (EMWP) and the Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADÉM).

Background

Embedding migration in comprehensive international partnerships is among the four policy pillars of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, alongside with secure external borders, fast and efficient procedures and an effective system of responsibility and solidarity. Such partnerships encompass a comprehensive set of issues of mutual interest to both the EU and its partner countries, such as: economic cooperation, green energy, digital and cultural exchanges, comprehensive and rights-based migration management and security. This new approach embeds migration in international partnerships to help prevent irregular departures and loss of life, fight migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, reinforce cooperation on return and readmission, support reintegration of returnees, and promote legal pathways, including through Talent Partnerships when strategically relevant from a migration management perspective². Following the first **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with **Tunisia** signed in July 2023, the EU concluded SCPs with **Egypt** and **Jordan** as well as agreed an enhanced cooperation and financial package of support with **Lebanon**. The EU also concluded a migration specific partnership with **Mauritania** on 7 March 2024.

² [Embedding migration in international partnerships.pdf](#)

Additionally, the creation of a new Directorate-General in charge of North Africa, Middle East and the Gulf (DG MENA), provides an opportunity for additional resources and more structured dialogue with the key regions from the migration viewpoint. Finally, engagement of Member States under the new Resettlement Regulation will play a crucial role in strengthening the EU's partnership with third countries. It will allow to show solidarity with third countries hosting a large number of persons in need of international protection, by helping to alleviate the pressure on those countries. The first Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan aims to reflect such strategic approach. The Union Plan, to be adopted this year, will detail the EU resettlement and humanitarian admission efforts to be implemented in 2026-2027.

Existing Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships, Financial Commitments and other types of engagement with partner third countries

1. Tunisia (July 2023)

The EU-Tunisia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, signed on 16 July 2023, encompasses five pillars, including on macro-economic stability, economy and trade, energy and migration. Support on migration relates to border management, including search and rescue, protection, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking activities, the return and readmission from the EU of Tunisian nationals in an irregular situation as well as the assisted voluntary return of third country migrants to their countries of origin, and the facilitation of legal mobility towards the EU. These actions have been supported by the allocation of €105 million in 2023.

2. Mauritania (March 2024)

The EU signed with Mauritania a Joint statement in March 2024, launching a Migration Partnership. Part of the EUR 210 million announced by President von der Leyen in February 2024 serves to support Mauritania in migration management, but the funds cover as well other key relevant sectors of cooperation, including humanitarian support, job creation and skill training under Global Gateway. The Joint Declaration, based on solidarity, shared responsibility, and respect for human rights, covers five areas: creating job opportunities, protection and asylum, promoting legal migration, reinforcing cooperation to prevent irregular migration, strengthening border management.

3. Egypt (March 2024)

A Joint Declaration launching the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership with Egypt was signed on 17 March 2024. The joint declaration on the Partnership is built around 6 key pillars: political relations, economic stability, investments and trade, migration and mobility, security and demography and human capital. The migration and mobility pillar covers protection, enhancing border security, combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, supporting returns and reintegration, and developing legal migration pathways such as Talent Partnerships. The operationalisation of these priorities will be supported through a foreseen financial allocation of €200 million from 2024 to 2027, under the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership.

4. Jordan (January 2025)

On 30 January 2025, the EU and Jordan signed a new Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership Agreement, marking a milestone in their relationship. The partnership includes a substantial financial package of €3 billion for 2025-2027, covering grants, investments, and macro-financial assistance. It focuses on key areas such as political relations, democracy, economic development, education, and support for refugees. This enhanced partnership recognises Jordan's crucial role in Middle Eastern stability, particularly given its hosting of Syrian refugees. Under the Migration pillar, the EU and Jordan will strengthen their cooperation on border management, the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

5. Libya

While no comprehensive EU-Libya partnership exists, a technical dialogue involving the European Commission, the EEAS and the Libyan authorities with competences in migration has been launched since the beginning of 2024, closely coordinated with Member States and the UN agencies. It aims at enhancing the migration governance and border management in Libya, including upscaling and speeding up the humanitarian voluntary returns from the country, anti-trafficking measures and strengthening the protection of migrants, including the management of the situation of the Sudanese refugees. Italy renewed its 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Libya in February 2024. The MoU facilitates joint patrols, detention centre funding, and returns of intercepted migrants. The EU indirectly supports these efforts through training and equipment for Libyan authorities, despite documented human rights abuses in detention centres.

6. Lebanon (May 2024)

While no comprehensive EU-Lebanon partnership exists, in August 2024 EUR allocation of 500 million was adopted for 2024 and 2025, to provide essential assistance to Lebanon's governance reform, economic stability and access to basic services for vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees. The package also includes EUR 70 million for the Lebanese Armed Forces and internal security forces to support Lebanon in border management, fight against organised crime and migrant smuggling. In view of the current situation in the region, the Commission allocated additional EUR 45 million for the increasing immediate and humanitarian needs following the escalation between Israel and Hezbollah, including EUR 25 million in humanitarian assistance, adding up to EUR 92 million of humanitarian aid in 2024. EUR 20 million NDICI funding was contracted by December 2024 to provide cash assistance for internally displaced persons, including vulnerable Lebanese and refugees from Syria, and primary healthcare services targeting hard-to-reach populations.

Involvement of the Council (fora) in the SCPs negotiations

Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships constitute non-binding instruments (NBI). This concept has been implemented for nearly two years now, the involvement of the Council and of its relevant preparatory bodies in the negotiations has not always been straightforward. Notably, in a letter of December 2024 from the Secretary-General of the Council, approved by Coreper, and addressed to the Commission, the MoU with Tunisia was listed as one of the agreements signed by the Commission before the Council gave its formal agreement. On the other hand, the Council fora, notably the Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP) on the policy level, regularly discuss the implementation of these SCPs (last time on 26 March); the Commission provides an update on the implementation of the SCPs at all the meetings of the Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADDEM), focusing on the operational level, and feeding the exchanges at Coreper's level. Member States are invited to provide more information about their initiatives, programmes and visits in these fora.

MOCADDEM notably prepares action files on the implementation of the migration pillars of relevant SCPs i.e., with regard to Tunisia, Mauritania and Egypt and monitors the progress on regular basis. A new action file on Jordan is in the pipeline. Moreover, the information on the state of play in the cooperation with these partners is exchanged during every MOCADDEM Roundtable.

“Innovative solutions” and comprehensive partnerships with third countries

In a letter dated from 15 May 2024, a group of 15 Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland and Romania) issued a joint call to “think out of the box” to counter irregular migration to Europe. They plead for comprehensive, mutually beneficial and durable partnerships with third countries located along the migratory routes and explore other innovative solutions ranging from return hubs in third countries to the use of “safe third country” (STC) concept.

SCPs and regional (cooperation) packages, notably Pact for the Mediterranean

The Commission sees the Pact for the Mediterranean as an opportunity for the EU to engage more actively with the countries of the region. The Pact will be officially presented this autumn as a Joint Communication of the Commission and EEAS and will be based on the 2021 Mediterranean Agenda. It will cover 10 countries of the region: Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan. The Pact will be very specific and will include flagship projects that could cover areas such as energy, trade, digital and transport connectivity, human capital, peace and security, culture but also migration. A scoping paper is currently being prepared to consult the Member States on the scope and the level of ambition. The EMWP meeting of 26 March 2025 discussed the relation between SCPs and the regional dimension, notably the existing regional dialogues such as the Budapest, Prague and Khartoum Process and the Pact for the Mediterranean. Among many contributions, some delegations called for a reflection on how those dialogues with the relevant partners can be more efficient and trust be better built, for instance, by understanding more strategically what added value these partners can bring to the EU at the negotiating table.

Building on the above, in view of the upcoming first European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy, the SCIFA delegates are invited to reflect on the three following questions:

1. *How do you assess the implementation of Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships, and the Council's role in the preparation and implementation of these partnerships?*
 2. *What role do you see for the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships in the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum? Do you see a need for any adjustments of this model in order to better support implementation of the Pact and reduce the irregular arrivals to the EU, including through new ways in line with EU and international law?*
 3. *How do you see the relation between the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships and the wider regional dimension, such as the existing regional dialogues, or the upcoming Pact for the Mediterranean and the wider shifting geopolitical environment? How can we best steer the work in the various streams, in order to be more successful in the priority political areas, avoiding overlaps and adopting a strategic approach to migration cooperation?*
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