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NOTE

from : the Presidency
to : Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA)
Subject : Presidency Programme on Asylum and Immigration

1. The UK Government believes strongly that closer EU cooperation in the area of asylum and immigration is in the interests of all Member States. We all share the same objectives: to encourage legal migration for economic and other purposes; to provide a safe haven for those genuinely fleeing persecution and to prevent abuse of our immigration control. None of us can successfully meet the challenges of managing migration acting alone. As Presidency, we aim to build on the concrete achievements in this area since the Tampere European Council in October 1999. We will take forward the relevant elements of the Hague Programme over the next six months, working closely with the Commission, the European Parliament, forthcoming Presidencies and other Member States.
2. We see three broad themes for the next six months: stronger EU engagement with the rest of the world in migration issues, strengthening border security, including dealing with organised immigration crime, and practical cooperation to manage migration.

A Stronger International Role

3. Migration is, of its very nature, international. The European Union, acting collectively, has significant impact in the world. We want the EU to play a stronger role in managing migration internationally: by improving the capacity of developing countries to protect refugees in their regions of origin; ensuring that economic migration to developed countries is managed to complement, not damage, the needs of developing countries; working in partnership with the countries on the EU's eastern and southern borders to better control migration flows; and acting strongly against illegal immigration, in particular to discourage people from falling into the hands of organised traffickers and smugglers.

4. Over the next six months, we will:
 - Develop and implement action plans for partnership with key countries on the EU borders, to deal with migration flows across the Mediterranean and from the East;
 - Take forward the EU's role in providing regional protection, based on the forthcoming Commission communication on the subject, including resettlement of genuine refugees in the EU. We will also host a seminar on resettlement;
 - Lead discussion in the High Level Working Group on the links between migration and development, based on the forthcoming Commission's communication;
 - Support the Commission in concluding readmission agreements with a number of the EU's international partners and making substantial progress in negotiation of others.

Stronger Borders, including action against organised immigration crime

5. The EU's borders need to be managed to ensure the smooth entry of legitimate travellers on the one hand and to prevent illegal immigration on the other. This is partly a matter of the physical border control, but it is also about the security of travel documents, visa issuing, acquiring and exchanging data on travellers with proper regard to data protection requirements, and effective arrangements for the return of immigration offenders. We also need to work to combat organised abuse of the border control and in particular to prevent people being facilitated into the EU for the purposes of exploitation.

6. Over the next six months, we will:

- Support the new European Border Agency's (Frontex) efforts to set up its risk analysis function and structures for co-ordinating joint operational activity;
- Take forward the work on security of travel documents, building on the measures agreed on biometrics in residence permits and passports and continuing to work towards a solution for biometrics in relation to visas. We will encourage cooperation on improving the security of national identity cards;
- Make progress on the visa information system for exchanging data on Schengen visas that have been issued, refused and revoked, including working closely with the European Parliament on the VIS instrument. We will support the Commission in developing a road map for implementation.
- Manage work on Schengen visa cooperation, including adjustments to the common visa list, visa facilitation and common visa application centres;
- Hold seminars on the use of new detection technology and the use of passenger data for border control purposes;
- Continue work, both within the Council and with the European Parliament, to make as much progress as possible on common arrangements for local border traffic;
- Particularly encourage work on innovative solutions on air borders;
- Take forward cooperation on the return of immigration offenders, including the forthcoming proposal from the Commission on minimum standards for returns and practical cooperation such as joint return flights.
- Work with the Commission to develop a joint strategy to combat people trafficking, as well as supporting operational activities to combat organised immigration crime.

Practical Cooperation on Managing Migration

7. In addition to the various legal measures that have been adopted over recent years, it is important to build on our practical cooperation. Over the next six months, we will:
- Take forward discussion of the new solidarity mechanism to provide future funding for border, integration, returns and refugee projects;
 - Lead discussion on exchange of best practice on the integration of migrants into our societies on the basis of the forthcoming Commission communication on this subject;
 - Improve exchange of information between Member States through Commission proposals on a mutual information network and on common approaches to the presentation of statistics;
 - Improve practical cooperation in the field of asylum, based on the forthcoming Commission communication on this subject.
