



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos on the situation in the Mediterranean at the LIBE Committee in the European Parliament

Brussels, 14 April 2015

Honourable Members,

Dear representative of the presidency,

Dear Dr. Gonzi,

I am very happy to be back in LIBE and to discuss with you.

Let me start by stressing how timely your initiative is and that I very much welcome the opportunity to exchange views, as we have done in previous meetings.

The arrival of more than 7000 migrants - according to Frontex estimates - over the past few days reminds us that we have to be well aware of the immediate realities at our borders.

Europe finds itself amidst a widening arc of instability ranging from the East all the way to North Africa.

On our Eastern flank, the conflict in the Ukraine, fuels instability and anxiety in the entire region.

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq generated a historic displacement of people, with serious security and socio-economic implications for neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Then, of course there is Libya, which has been a recurrent theme in many of your recent debates.

With such a set of circumstances in our neighbourhood, we have to prepare for a heavy migratory season, and the Commission is ready to do its part to support and assist those Member States that are affected the most and have urgent needs.

In fact, we have recently offered emergency financial support to a number of Member States and we are ready to do this again in the future if needed.

We are following the on-going actions already identified and developed under the *Task Force Mediterranean*, but more actions will be needed to deal with the current situation:

- to support the asylum systems under pressure with the help of EASO;
- and to assist member States protecting their borders through Frontex in all affected Member States; not only Italy, but also along the Eastern Mediterranean border in Greece and Bulgaria.

We have to understand that the current context - in other words, the unprecedented influx of migrants at our borders and in particular, refugees - is unfortunately the new norm and we will need to adjust our responses accordingly.

These recurring events are indeed one more justification to move from reacting to emergencies to implementing a comprehensive approach that addresses the migratory challenges at their roots.

The European Agenda on Migration that will be adopted in May is the start of a process to present a set of effective and sustainable actions to address migratory challenges.

This will be the basis on which the Commission considers that the European Union should move forward.

The European Agenda on Migration is built on four pillars that are closely inter-related and of equal importance:

- A strong Common European Asylum System that guarantees assistance to those in need of protection but limit the abuses;
- A new policy on legal migration to define the framework under which people with different skills that we need can come to Europe;
- A robust fight against irregular migration that includes a clear plan to fight smuggling and trafficking of migrants and an effective return policy;
- Borders that protect a Europe that remains open.

To face these challenges, the European Commission or the European Union cannot solve all the

problems alone. It is clear that we have to develop a comprehensive approach and we need to act together with the Member States. That is why I have engaged in a dialogue with each of them. I have almost met all ministers of Interior and I'm visiting many Member States. At these occasions, I always call Member States to show solidarity through concrete actions.

The recent incidents in the Mediterranean, with thousands of migrants crossing - mainly from Libya but also from Turkey - to Italy and Greece, is a stark reminder that we also need to engage in a substantial way with third countries.

That is why I will also visit key third countries (Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia).

The recent joint LIBE-DEV Committee meeting is, in my opinion, further proof of the nexus between migration and development and we intend to take this up in the preparation of our Agenda.

We have to enhance cooperation with third countries and also apply tools from foreign policy, neighbourhood policies, development aid and trade in order to achieve the objective of better-managed migratory flows.

This cannot be a one-way relationship. Third countries must also see the benefits of working with us on migration.

We will also continue to provide support to neighbouring third countries in their commendable efforts to host displaced persons or to combat human traffickers and smugglers.

At the same time, a successful migration policy also depends on connected and effective employment, education and research policies.

Dear Honourable Members,

Given our short- and long-term challenges I cannot but reiterate the importance of developing a constructive and close cooperation between the European Institutions and, in particular, with the European Parliament.

When it comes to migration, we cannot afford to follow competing agendas. The European Agenda on Migration will take into account the Strategic Guidelines adopted by the Member States last June and the resolution for a holistic approach adopted by the Parliament last December.

I am here today to continue our dialogue and to listen to your suggestions and discuss them with you. I did not come here to give you definitive answers and details on what the Agenda will include.

I am here to listen to your proposals, so that I can feed them into the ongoing discussions in the Commission that will lead to the adoption of the European Agenda on Migration at the end of May.

Thank you for your attention.

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