



Speaking points of Commissioner Avramopoulos from the meeting with the LIBE committee

Brussels, 14 January 2016

Honourable members,

It's our first meeting this year and I take the opportunity to wish you a happy New Year. I am by nature optimistic and determined to face the challenges, encouraged by your precious support, but we have to be realistic and honest.

The situation is getting worse: This year, we had no winter break, with between 3,000 and 4,000 arrivals every day in Greece over the Christmas and New Year period. More and more Member States are reintroducing internal border controls; the terrorist attack in Istanbul, like the ones before in other places, reminds us that terrorism is a global threat, and that it targets our core values, our humanity. It seeks to divide us. Let me condemn it in the strongest possible terms and express my condolences to the families of the victims.

We are at a critical moment, where our unity is at stake – both when it comes to the refugee crisis and our security. Europe is at a crossroads. Our task is not to fuel fear or backtrack and water down our goals; our task and our responsibility is to show the way, to show leadership.

So far, the European Commission has taken the lead and fully played its role in proposing European solutions to the co-legislators. It has fully played its role to follow-up on the implementation of the decisions agreed by the Council and the European Parliament.

But, we need results. We need Member States to deliver on their commitments. We need to demonstrate that we, Europeans, can manage the situation.

Let me start with security: The list of terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015 is long, the victims numerous. Our response is defined by two words: resolve and resilience.

The events have shown that the priorities set in the European Agenda on Security are the right ones. Since our last dialogue, we have drastically accelerated the delivery of the Agenda. I welcome the agreement on the EU PNR Directive, as well as on the Europol Regulation and the data protection reform. These will be crucial for our collective security. They should now be formally adopted as soon as possible.

New proposals are now on the table on firearms and terrorism. You and the Council should now discuss them as a matter of priority and find an agreement as soon as possible.

We have also taken big steps at the operational level:

- The Internet Referral Unit at Europol has been operational since 1 July.
- The RAN Centre of Excellence has been functioning since last October, with reinforced resources for civil society to counter radicalisation at the local level.
- On 3 December we launched the EU Internet Forum to work with industry against the abuse of the internet by terrorists.
- On 1 January, the European Counter Terrorism Centre became operational at Europol.

2016 will be the year when we will redouble our efforts on terrorism financing. We will follow the money of terrorists and we will do all in our power to disrupt their sources.

We will also prepare:

- A proposal on combatting fraud and counterfeiting on non-cash means of payment.
- A proposal to review the Regulation on Explosives Precursors.

Turning now to migration: Last year, we launched important legislative and operational initiatives addressing the migration phenomenon in a comprehensive way. Faced with a high number of migrants putting their lives at risk to reach Italy, we have tripled financial support to the Triton operation in the Mediterranean. As a result, many lives were saved through the Joint Operations in the Mediterranean.

Over the summer, there was a clear shift in the migratory route towards the eastern Mediterranean

and Greece. To address this situation, rapid intervention teams were deployed.

The Commission has played a leading role in the intensification of the cooperation between Member States and the countries of the Western Balkans in order to manage better the flows, resulting in better coordination on a weekly basis.

We have provided financial and technical support to Greece. To alleviate the situation of the frontline Member States, we adopted in record time the first European relocation and resettlement schemes.

But decisions are not enough. We all agree that these schemes have not delivered the expected results. All Member States have to play the game and show more solidarity.

We have seriously stepped-up our dialogue and cooperation with the main countries of origin and transit. With Turkey, we reached an agreement on an EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan. While we cannot be satisfied yet with the speed of implementation of the Action Plan, we are continuing our cooperation with our Turkish partners in order to stem the flows. In this context, the work on our recommendation for a voluntary humanitarian admission scheme with Turkey is an important flanking measure.

Following the Valetta summit, we are in the process of implementing the agreed measures in the cooperation with important African countries. Member States need to increase their pledges to the Trust Fund.

I would like to thank the European Parliament for the support you have given to substantially reinforce the 2015 and 2016 Migration and Home Affairs Budget by a total of around EUR 1.8 Billion.

With these measures, we shaped the Union's response to the ongoing crisis situation. But clearly there is still a very long way to go to operationalise these measures and stem the flows of migrants reaching Europe through irregular channels.

We not only operate in crisis-mode; the Commission also sees the bigger picture. That is why we are also focusing on delivering on the medium and long-term actions foreseen under the Agenda on Migration to put in place a more sustainable system for the future, based on the principles of fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity.

A first element is the Border package we presented in December. It is clear that we need to improve the management of our external borders in order to maintain Schengen. The proposals outline a new approach to the management of our common external borders.

The proposals significantly reinforce the mandate of Frontex in the form of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. The Agency will also have considerably strengthened powers in the field of return.

Let me be clear: Europe will provide protection for those who need it, but those who have no right to be here, have to be returned. In 2016, we will come forward with further measures.

The crisis has shown that the management of our asylum system needs to be fundamentally rethought: The Commission will propose a revision of the Dublin system. We will also present a comprehensive package on legal migration and integration.

We need to provide credible alternatives for irregular migration and enhance our legal channels. That is why we will propose a revision of the Blue Card.

At the same time, we have to proactively ensure that the newly arrived who receive protection are enabled to fully participate in our societies. The Commission stands ready to help Member States cope with these challenges.

Reflections are also ongoing to propose a structured system for resettlement. And as regards the fight against migrant smuggling, the Commission will propose to strengthen the existing legal framework later this year.

Finally, the evaluation of the operation and use of the Schengen Information System is ongoing and will be finalised by April 2016. The Commission will make the necessary proposals for improvements on the basis of this review.

The EU is faced with real challenges, but I am convinced that the only way to master them is by working together based on our commonly agreed Agendas.

At the same time, we are also working to deliver on other issues: A modified proposal on Smart Borders will be presented by March 2016, as promised.

Dear colleagues, our cooperation has been excellent and I continue to count on your support. I actually count on it even more now, in a moment when populism and nationalism are gaining ground and, I cannot hide it, this is what worries me the most. And in today's debate I want to hear your views on it.

Thank you.

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