

Progress under the European Agenda on Migration: Press conference by Commissioner Avramopoulos

Dear all,

With all our partners inside and outside Europe, we are working hard to deliver both on the internal and external dimension of our common migration policy.

All our actions are based on three fundamental principles: respect, responsibility-sharing and solidarity. All elements are interlinked and we cannot move on one without the other.

Today we celebrate 30 years of Erasmus Plus. More than 9 million students have participated so far already. They are the ambassadors of Europe, living and building our openness, further fostering a European consciousness.

It is the duty of our generation to consolidate and uphold these European values, which are now unfortunately at stake and put into question, particularly in the field of migration.

But on migration, we have come a long way as a Union.

What is essential now, is to sustain and further enhance this progress, at all levels, and by everyone.

Let me start with the EU-Turkey Statement: despite sometimes challenging circumstances it continues to deliver steady results. The number of arrivals remains low. Returns from Greece to Turkey need to be accelerated, in full respect of EU and international law, in order to reduce the migratory pressure on the Aegean islands.

As regards the Partnership Framework, one year after we launched it, we have made tangible progress in building stronger relations with five African priority countries: Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Ethiopia. In the last months, we have started to engage with additional important countries of origin not only in Africa but also in Asia.

We are discussing with all these countries on how to address the root causes of irregular migration more effectively and to rapidly improve our cooperation on all aspects of migration management.

Niger is a symbolic example of what can be achieved under the Partnership Framework. With our coordinated engagement with the Niger authorities, controls and police actions have been stepped up leading to the arrest of migrant smugglers.

Meanwhile, many stranded migrants have been assisted to voluntarily return to

their countries of origin. We should expand this model of cooperation with other transit countries in the region.

In parallel, following up on the Malta Declaration, we continue to work with Libya and the neighbouring countries in North Africa to stem the irregular flows in the Central Mediterranean and prevent the loss of life at sea.

The Italian Coast Guard is helping the Libyan Coast Guard to improve its operational capabilities for Search and Rescue. For this purpose we awarded yesterday Italy with EUR 1.8 million in additional emergency assistance.

In addition to the support provided to the Libyan Coast Guard, we have started to provide assistance to migrants and refugees stranded in Libya. Thanks to our cooperation with international partners on the ground, more than 3,300 migrants have returned from Libya to their countries of origin: This is more than the number of migrants returned from Libya in the entire year of 2016.

We will be able to provide more support also to our Member States on returns: with the full roll-out of the European Border and Coast Guard steadily continuing, already the pace of return operations from Europe continues to grow, with more than 6,500 returns in 2017 so far organised by the European Border and Coast Guard.

I call on Member States to rapidly increase their use of the Agency's capabilities on return but also to urgently address the gaps in human resources and technical equipment, in particular for the ongoing operations.

Ladies and gentlemen, We also have to make progress to better manage migration inside the European Union. We cannot and will not leave Member States at the external border on their own.

All those eligible – a number that is much lower than 160,000 – should be relocated in the coming months. We can achieve this objective if all Member States take their fair share.

I want to commend and thank those Member States that have continued relentlessly with their efforts so that in May we almost had 2,400 relocation transfers. In total, almost 20,300 asylum seekers in clear need of protection have been relocated.

But relocation is not a choice. It is a legal decision, with legal obligations, agreed on collectively, and which has to be carried out collectively, without exceptions.

There have been enough delays, and there have been enough discussions. It is time for action.

I regret to see that despite our repeated calls to pledge and relocate, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland have not yet taken the necessary action. For this reason, the Commission has decided to launch infringement procedures against these three Member States.

We have to be fair towards those Member States that do fulfil their obligations. I sincerely hope that these Member States can still reconsider their position and contribute fairly.

On resettlement we see positive and continued progress, with more than 16,000 persons resettled so far from Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

This is almost 75% of the agreed total of 22,504 people to be resettled before September. Resettlements under the EU-Turkey Statement reached a new record high in May 2017 with almost 1,000 Syrian refugees being provided with safe and legal pathways to Europe.

Dear all,

What this shows, is that it is entirely feasible to show solidarity to both the people in need as well as countries under pressure, who are hosting them – whether it is for resettlement or relocation. What it takes is political will and a spirit of commitment to our European obligations.

Europe is not only about requesting for funds or ensuring security. Yes these are all important. But Europe is also about sharing difficult moments and challenges as well as common dreams.

In other words, Europe is about sharing. And political will means political responsible leadership.

But let me be clear once again: we only relocate or resettle people in clear need of protection. These are people who have been very thoroughly identified, screened and fingerprinted.

In fact, it is precisely by not facilitating relocation or resettlement that one contributes to secondary flows and to irregular arrivals – and this in turn contributes to security risks.

Only by relocating and by resettling, by following the procedures, can we effectively and jointly reduce irregular and secondary migration flows, and any potential security risks.

It is now high time for everyone to deliver.

Thank you.