

Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos following the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Luxembourg

Dear all,

Today was an important Home Affairs Council – the last one before the summer and before the European Council, and also the last one under the Bulgarian Presidency.

I hereby take the occasion to thank my colleague Valentin Radev for the excellent work of their Presidency in the last six months on everything: migration, border management and security.

Mr Radev was a very good president, he steered meetings in a successful way. His moderate spirit and interventions helped all colleagues find solutions. He will be remembered as a very successful president.

There has been a lot of focus on migration and the asylum reform today so let me start with that.

Firstly, I would like to make clear that Dublin and the asylum reform cannot be disconnected from the bigger migration picture.

We are here today in Luxembourg, almost three years after we launched the first emergency measures to deal with what was then a refugee and migration crisis.

Where do we stand today?

- We have overall significantly fewer arrivals as well as important decreases in the number of asylum requests.
- Our external borders are better protected, thanks to the European Border and Coast guard, which we plan to strengthen even more in the next EU budget.
- We are making good progress in our cooperation with the third countries on return.

Does that mean our work is over? No, far from it.

The situation remains fragile because we still see migratory pressure on some of the migratory routes – although not at all comparable to the crisis period – in Greece, along the Western Balkan route, but also in the Western Mediterranean. The recent lives lost at sea over the past few days are a stark reminder that we need to step up our efforts even more.

In addition to our efforts to better protect our borders and cooperate with third countries, we must uphold our duty to offer protection to those in

need, and towards desperate people fleeing war and persecution.

To uphold this duty, we need a truly common European asylum system.

Asylum seekers cannot simply choose where they go, and we cannot allow secondary movements any longer.

Our system needs to be strict but fair – with procedures that quickly provide protection to those in need while returning those who are not entitled to stay.

This morning, we had open and frank discussions, steered by the compromise prepared by the Bulgarian Presidency.

I will continue to fully support the Presidency's efforts to reach an agreement that is acceptable and fair to all sides.

Finally, I wish to say a word about our ongoing efforts on security and counter-terrorism.

Our discussions today took place in the aftermath of the horrible attack in Liège last week, which shows that the threat against our citizens' security still exists in many ways.

But we have not been idle on this front in Europe. I am glad that yesterday we had a discussion with the ministers on victims of terrorism, and that Council Conclusions on this important matter were adopted.

We need to ensure that victims are treated with respect, dignity, in a professional, tailored and non-discriminatory manner by all actors who come into contact with them.

We also want to improve cooperation mechanisms to support victims across national borders, through the development of a Coordination Centre for European Victims of Terrorism.

At the same time, we are working hand in hand with all Ministers to enhance information exchange and operational cooperation between all relevant authorities.

In this context, I am pleased that the Crime Information Cell pilot project will be operational in the coming days. Europol and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency are fully ready to deploy their personnel aboard Operation Sophia. As we head into summer, we are reminded that this is no moment to slow down our comprehensive efforts – whether on migration, border management or security.

Thank you