Press statement by Commissioner Avramopoulos on the first measures under the European Agenda on Migration

Brussels, 27 May 2015

Today, the Commission has shown that it can act quickly and firmly to better manage migration. Only two weeks after the adoption of the European Agenda on Migration, we are making another important step. We are moving from policy planning to policy making. We are taking concrete actions. This new step underscores the Commission's determination and commitment to implement this Agenda.

So, let's see what we have put on the table today.

We have a European resettlement scheme for 20,000 persons who are in clear need of international protection. They will be resettled from countries outside Europe to EU Member States.

We also have a proposal for an emergency mechanism to relocate 40,000 asylum seekers. Syrians and Eritreans will be relocated from Italy and Greece to other EU Member States over a period of 2 years. For the first time, we will trigger the emergency mechanism under Article 78 point 3 of the Treaty. Malta faced a similar situation in the past and was supported, but not in the same way. We learned from this experience.

This time, we are ready to propose emergency measures if other Member States also face a sudden influx of migrants.

Let me clarify some points.

The European Agenda on Migration has raised very diverse reactions in the press, in the Member States and in the European Parliament.

Overall, the comments on the Agenda are positive. But there are also some misunderstandings.

There is no proposal to relocate irregular migrants across the EU.

We do not propose the fixing of "quotas"; it's a word we don't like and we don't use.

All this is about ensuring solidarity, but it is up to each Member States to decide on how many persons they will grant refugee status.

If countries want to relocate or resettle more persons, they can. But we want to ensure minimum solidarity.

As I said many times before, the European Agenda on Migration is a comprehensive policy.

The Agenda does not only address the situation in the Mediterranean, nor does it only deal with the distribution of asylum seekers across the EU.

The Agenda is balanced package, based on a very simple principle: extend a helping hand to those in need and strive to attract those we need.

But this will be balanced by strong and targeted action against those who try to abuse the system. That is why today we are also launching several different and concrete measures to respond to the current migration challenges.

To secure our borders and save lives, the new Operational Plan of Triton includes a significant number of additional assets and extends its geographical scope to cover the area of the former Italian operation Mare Nostrum. Almost all Member States are participating. Yesterday, Frontex signed the new operational plan of the Joint Operation Triton. This will help to save lives.

We have an Action Plan on migrant smuggling. It goes far beyond the destruction of ships. The plan will follow all major smuggling routes, from beginning to end. That is why we have to strengthen our cooperation with the countries origin and transit. That is also why I recently visited Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco.

Moreover, to crack down on smugglers, we will step up prevention and collect information. We will also
reinforce the investigation and prosecution of criminal networks of smugglers.

We need to improve asylum processing. The full and coherent implementation of the Common European Asylum System is one of our priorities. For its implementation, we adopted guidelines to ensure that all Member States use the same gradual measures on fingerprinting.

To develop a new policy on legal migration, we are finally launching a public consultation on the Blue Card directive. This is a first step towards its revision and to ensure that Europe attracts the qualified people it needs.

As announced in the Agenda, the Commission with the Agencies will also deploy "hotspot" teams. EASO, Frontex and Europol will work on the ground to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants and assess those who are in need of protection from those who are not. This process will complement actions that will increase the effectiveness of the return of irregular migrants.

Needless to say, all these measures require significant funds for their implementation. In a short period of time, we secured a total of €450 million.

So, as you can see, we mean what we say. But this is only the beginning. We are determined to take many more steps. We will move forward. I sincerely hope that the Council, Member States and the Parliament will also move forward with us.

Thank you.