



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos on progress made under the European Agenda on Migration

Brussels, 6 March 2019

Dear all,

Migration will continue to be an important topic, and we know it will feature prominently in many election campaigns across Europe in the run-up to the European elections.

Yet, amid misinformation, untruths and fake news, it is sometimes hard to know what is actually going on when it comes to migration in Europe.

That is why I would like to take the opportunity today to give you a few clear, rock-solid facts of where we stand, what has been achieved, and what still needs to be done.

The first very tangible fact is that the times of crisis when hundreds of thousands of people were coming by sea to Greece and Italy are behind us. The numbers have decreased continuously year-over-year since 2015 and are now back to levels not seen since 2013.

That does not mean that we should rest on our laurels. In the Western Mediterranean, Spain is under particular migratory pressure.

We continue to stand by Spain, as we have done and will continue doing with all Member States under pressure.

We already provided nearly 36 million euros of emergency assistance last year and we are ready to provide Spain the technical, financial, and political support it needs.

At the same time, it is also clear that we need to strengthen our relationship with Morocco.

Morocco has already been working to strengthen control of its border and prevent a large number of irregular departures.

I would like to commend Morocco for its actions and assure Morocco of our support. We look forward to developing a closer, deeper and more ambitious partnership with Morocco.

This begins by completing the implementation of the 140 million euro support package for Morocco that focuses on improving their border management capacity.

In Greece, the migratory pressure has also come down significantly, from 10,000 arrivals per day in 2015 to just 81 in 2018.

This has been made possible thanks to the EU-Turkey Statement and over 2 billion euros of financial support from the EU budget.

But the dire conditions and overcrowding on the islands remain issues of concern. This is also why I met with the Greek authorities earlier this week. The Greek authorities must put in place an effective national strategy on migration management that would see better cooperation between national authorities. More efforts are needed to speed up the processing of asylum requests as well as the return procedures.

My most pressing concern however is for the provision of adequate accommodation places for over 2000 unaccompanied minors. It is the Greek authorities that are responsible for the overall migration management in Greece. We have been and will continue supporting the Greek authorities operationally, financially and politically.

Let me give you another fact.

Our external borders are better managed and better protected than ever before. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency brought about a step change in our common border management culture.

But we want to help and support Member States even more in securing our external borders.

I recently took part in the first political trilogue with the Council and the European Parliament on our proposal to further strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard Agency with a standing corps of 10.000 operational staff. Discussions are progressing well.

It is critical that we manage to reach agreement on the proposal before the May elections and show

that Europe can deliver. I am hopeful about this.

But no matter how secure and protected our external borders are, Europe will still have to uphold its duty to provide assistance to those fleeing war or persecutions. Europe will still need to better manage migration within Europe, both of those staying legally and irregularly.

For instance, we have to be able to stop secondary movements or asylum shopping. This is why we equally need to finalise the reform of our Common European Asylum System.

Important progress has been made already. Further steps should now be taken to advance as much as possible and to adopt those files that are close to an agreement. We will continue working with the European Parliament and the Council to progress towards the finishing line. What we need now is political will.

In the meantime, we cannot continue to rely on *ad-hoc* measures, and I know that most Member States agree on this. The experiences this summer and earlier this year have shown the need, but have also shown the way forward.

We need a solid and predictable coordination structure, with operational support from our agencies, and financial support from the EU budget. But most importantly: we need as many Member States as possible to participate.

I welcome that the Romanian Presidency already started working towards putting in place such arrangements, and I count on Member States to engage.

Dear all, we have come a long way in four years. What was true in 2015, still holds today: No country can do this alone:

And we cannot focus just on one type of action. We need to work on all fronts, together, and at the same time. The global migration pressure and the risk of instability in our neighbourhood will keep migration at the top of the political agenda.

Everyone agrees that we cannot go back to the situation of 2015. The only way forward therefore is to keep working on our comprehensive approach:

- building ambitious partnerships with third countries,
- strengthening our external borders,
- and putting in place a future-proof asylum system.

Most importantly, what the last four years have shown is that *only* when we work together, we can succeed.

Thank you.

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