

Interview with David Speers, Sky News

DAVID SPEERS:

Prime Minister thanks for talking to Sky News. Now you've said that India is evolving into an economic superpower and that its military and strategic power will come with that. What does that mean for the regional status quo? How do you think India is going to use this power?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well India is committed to the rule of law, it's the world's largest democracy, a very successful democracy. India will be a force for stability in the region. Its values are the same as ours, it believes that international affairs should be governed by international law, disputes where they arise should be settled peacefully and in accordance with –

DAVID SPEERS:

So having a third power in a region – are we talking here along the lines of the power that China and the United States have got in the region? Is that a good thing for Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the answer is yes. I believe India has, India's values are very deeply ingrained. This is a democracy and, India is an extraordinary, an extraordinary phenomenon. I mean this a nation that hadn't existed as a nation prior to 1947. It's extraordinarily diverse, there are 22 languages, at least 22 languages, 11 scripts. It hasn't had the same history of political unity, for example as China has which goes back, in China's case thousands of years. So the fact that India has been so successful as a nation, as a democracy is an extraordinary achievement in itself.

DAVID SPEERS:

Now, big part of your visit here has been to push the trade agenda. On the free trade agreement negotiations though, as you've acknowledged, the Indian bureaucracy perhaps hasn't been as enthusiastic as you would have liked. What about the Australian bureaucracy though? Do we even have a chief negotiator for the India free trade agreement at the moment?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the negotiations are being conducted by the, you know the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade –

DAVID SPEERS:

But do they have a chief negotiator?

PRIME MINISTER:

We do and we will be bringing the negotiators back to the table. The critical point here David is that India has a long tradition of protectionism. It would be probably too strong to say it was a closed economy but it was, very big barriers to foreign investment, to foreign trade. So that was its culture. So China, although not a democracy and a communist state opened up to foreign trade and investment much earlier than India did, at least 20 years before, and so that's when I say India is evolving, it is evolving but old habits and attitudes are ingrained. And so what PM Modi and I are doing is making sure that both sides get together, put their respective claims on the table.

Now you see from our point of view, we are an open market already. We have free trade agreements, free access –

DAVID SPEERS:

Which means we probably don't have a lot to offer India? The one thing they do want is greater access to our labour market, for more Indians to be able to come and work in Australia. I understand this has been raised with you by business leaders you've been meeting here. Are you willing to offer anything on that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we already have a skills based temporary migration program. As you know, there are many Indians working in Australia on 457 visas or after they've studied, studied at an Australian university – they're entitled, depending on the degree to do, entitled to work for a period. So there's already a lot of Indian temporary skilled workers in Australia –

DAVID SPEERS:

So you're not willing to go beyond what we do already?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we already provide very substantial access and our temporary migration program is geared to the demands of our economy so we are not putting artificial restraints on it and we're certainly not discriminating but having said that, if a job is able to be done by an Australian it should be done by an Australian. Now that's, that is, every nation is entitled to take that point of view and we certainly do.

DAVID SPEERS:

Now Prime Minister, during this visit you've had to keep up to date on what's been going on with some, well, increasingly concerning international developments. Can I ask you about North Korea firstly? President Donald Trump has tweeted: "North Korea is looking for trouble if China decides to help that would be great, if not we will solve the problem without them, U.S.A."

What do you take that to mean?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'll leave that for the American President to –

DAVID SPEERS:

But you're an ally –

PRIME MINISTER:

Expand on –

DAVID SPEERS:

Prime Minister, a strong ally. This is an issue that matters to Australia.

PRIME MINISTER:

It does and the obligation I believe is on China as North Korea's closest ally, as its neighbour, as its most significant economic partner to enforce the UN sanctions and to bring the pressure to bear on North Korea that only China can to ensure that the regime stops this dangerous and reckless conduct-

DAVID SPEERS:

It's not doing that already, China?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it is not, clearly not doing enough. So the Chinese side would say that they have imposed some sanctions but the reality is that the regime is threatening peace and stability in the region and in the world and so the Chinese are the parties with the greatest leverage over North Korea. That's a fact. So it is vitally important I believe for China to use its influence to ensure North Korea stops this conduct.

DAVID SPEERS:

The other issue is Syria, now going back a week when this chemical weapons attack first happened you called for an independent international investigation but then a few days later when the US launched its missile strike on Syria you were convinced that Assad was responsible. What convinced you?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well basically the intelligence, and I'm not disclosing any secrets here, the Americans made it very public – it is very clear that the chemical attack was undertaken by the Assad regime.

DAVID SPEERS:

So you were shown intelligence?

PRIME MINISTER:

I'm not going to go into what I was shown.

DAVID SPEERS:

No I don't want you to, but you were shown some evidence?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is a matter of – I am not going to go into intelligence that I have been shown but it is –

DAVID SPEERS:

I'm not asking you to do that.

PRIME MINISTER:

A matter of public knowledge, David, that the United States have made it very clear that the, and it is not frankly, it is not seriously contested by anybody that this was an attack undertaken by the Assad regime and the American response was swift and it was just.

DAVID SPEERS:

Well others though are still saying there needs to be an independent investigation. Is that still your view or not?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm sure there will be an investigation and there should be because obviously it's important to know who the individuals were involved, the more we can find out about it the better because individual actors need to be held to account.

DAVID SPEERS:

The point –

PRIME MINISTER:

But it was clear, it is clear the attack was conducted by the Assad regime.

DAVID SPEERS:

The point I am making though is you went from, your initial reaction, we need an investigation to then, coinciding with the missile strikes, saying it is definitely Assad, he's committed a war crime. I am not asking you to tell us what intelligence you might have seen, but there was clear cut evidence you saw?

PRIME MINISTER:

I can say that the matter, I am not going to go into intelligence that I have seen or not seen, I can say to you however, as the US has made public and has been widely acknowledged, this was an attack that was undertaken by the Assad regime and the American response was appropriate, it was just and it was swift.

DAVID SPEERS:

Now what has it achieved, that missile strike?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it has served to send a very clear message to the Assad regime that the United States will not tolerate the Assad regime using chemical weapons against its own people, in breach of international law, in breach of its own undertakings, in fact, as you know, to dispose of its chemical weapons stockpile. Also, at a more tactical level, it has prevented that airfield being used, or the aeroplanes and the infrastructure of that airfield being used to deliver chemical weapons again. It sends a very strong message but it was very carefully calibrated. You see, the balance here is providing the strong response, the calibrated response that sends the message, prevents a repeat, but obviously then invites all parties to, as the President said, reach a resolution.

DAVID SPEERS:

The reality is Syria continues, and even from that airfield, continues to use conventional weapons to bomb its own people. Putin hasn't shifted his position on, his support for Assad either. I mean, it hasn't really changed the game in Syria much has it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, that is what you assert. Time will tell. This is a very complex, some would say, almost an intractable political and military conflict in Syria, but a solution has to be found. It has defied a solution for too long, too many people have died in Syria. And it is up to the nations of the world, as the President said, civilised nations of the world to reach a resolution to ensure a resolution is reached in Syria. This has gone on for too long.

DAVID SPEERS:

And you've said this week it can't include Bashar al-Assad, the political solution. Have you given much thought to who should be in power?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, David, the answer, let me make two points here. Bashar al-Assad's conduct, brutal conduct was one of the factors that started the conflict in the first place, right? So his continued oppression of his people, this chemical attack, surely disqualifies him from any role in a political

settlement, this is both a moral statement and a practical statement. I'm echoing what has been said by the American Administration.

DAVID SPEERS:

So if not him?

PRIME MINISTER:

Having said that there are various parties, various interest groups, ethnic groups, religious groups in Syria. It's a very complex environment and clearly in any settlement everybody will need to feel that they are being represented or acknowledged in the outcome so that is why it's a very complex problem.

DAVID SPEERS:

Finally, you're heading back home to a few weeks in lead up to the budget. I know you don't want to get into too much pre-budget speculation.

PRIME MINISTER:

No I don't want to get into any actually.

DAVID SPEERS:

But, as you know –

PRIME MINISTER:

It is your melancholy duty to invite me to engage in it.

DAVID SPEERS:

Correct. In fact, there is quite a debate going on amongst your own colleagues, forget us journalists, about the idea of not raiding superannuation but diverting contributions to superannuation into some sort of account to build up a first home deposit. You had previously said 'thoroughly bad idea'. Has your position changed?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I'm not going to, as I said earlier when I was invited to comment on this, I'm not going to get involved in pre-budget speculation. It is less than a month away and it is, all of these issues are very important. I would just make one observation on housing and again I've said it many dozens of times before – housing affordability, or the unaffordability of housing, particularly for new home buyers is a major challenge especially in our two biggest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, where there's been really strong house price inflation, growth in house prices. This has been a consequence of there being inadequate supply. This demand, we've had strong population growth, strong demand but at the same time we haven't had enough dwellings being built over a long period of time. This is not an issue that has come up over

the last year. So what is happening is you are seeing more supply coming on and that is very good but there is a lot to catch up. But, believe me, I mean the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Phil Lowe said this the other day – the fundamental reason why housing prices have shot up so much in Sydney and Melbourne but less so in the rest of Australia, in fact in some markets they've actually gone the other way, has been because of this imbalance between supply and demand.

DAVID SPEERS:

And letting people use their superannuation deposits to buy a house, that might have the adverse impact some suspect?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well this is all part of the pre-budget debate and I'm watching it all but as far as what is going to be in the budget that is a matter for budget night.

DAVID SPEERS:

But on principle itself, superannuation should be locked up for retirement – do you agree with that in principle?

PRIME MINISTER:

The purpose of superannuation is to provide for retirement, that's the objective, the legislative objective of superannuation is to provide for retirement that's the whole purpose of it and that's the way the whole system is set up in the first place.

DAVID SPEERS:

Good system?

PRIME MINISTER:

I believe yes it is. Particularly since the reforms we made last year, it has become, the super system has become, its fairer, its more flexible and I think the reforms we made last year, I know they were controversial in some quarters but they have made a very significant improvement in the availability of super, particularly for women and for people on lower incomes and people who have had disruptive periods of employment, but also, it's a very important part of ensuring Australians when they retire have the resources to have a dignified and comfortable retirement.

DAVID SPEERS:

Prime Minister, thank you for your time. Safe travels home.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you very much.

[ENDS]

Doorstop at the University of Mumbai

PRIME MINISTER:

Well stronger and deeper cooperation between Australia and India in every area. Fierce rivals on the sporting field of course but you see the cooperation here that we're going to, that's going to result from this new initiative, it's got strong support from the Indian Prime Minister Mr Modi and very strong support from our Government.

India wants to be more successful in elite sport at the Olympic level, to have Olympic performance that matches its cricketing prowess, as the Minister was saying earlier, but also to see that sport is more widely engaged in across the community and of course starting with the young kids.

It's great to see John Gloster is here and the work he's done with his business to provide an application to support sports training and monitoring across 200,000 students in 200 schools. A great example of Australian expertise in sport and sport conditioning and of course using the technology of the 21st century.

So I'm delighted to be here and of course what a thrill to be here with Sachin Tendulkar. We've had a great discussion and just then we were talking about some of the villages that he's supporting in the Kurukshetra where there is enormous problems of drought and water scarcity and we've talked about how we can assist him and support him with some of the technology and techniques that have been so successful in Australia.

This trip has been all about a deeper and more engaged collaboration between Australia and India in economics, in sport, in health, in science, in education and of course in national security. Very productive visit and it's wonderful to be here with all of these bright eyed young children.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, on that, with the deeper engagement, there's been a strong undertone on this trip on regional security and that speech you gave to the Defence College.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

JOURNALIST:

How important is India now as a regional player? And how important does it need to become in terms of the international rules-based order in North Korea and all those other challenges?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well India is enormously important. India is the second largest country by population, it will shortly be the largest. It is evolving into an economic super power and one that will have the regional military and strategic clout that comes with that kind of economic strength.

So India is committed to the maintenance of the rules-based international order. We share the same values of democracy and the rule of law.

So we are committed to the same outcomes that as I said are in the region and around the world – rules based order and where there are disputes that they're settled peacefully in accordance with international law.

JOURNALIST:

PM there's a lot of tough talk coming out of North Korea about even using nuclear weapons. Should Australians be concerned about that? Should others be concerned about it? And what's your response to those threats?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the whole world is concerned about the reckless and dangerous conduct of the North Korean regime.

It is a threat, it threatens regional stability, it threatens global peace and the time has come for all parties, but in particular China which has the closest relationship with North Korea, to bring pressure to bear on North Korea through the sanctions, regime and other means to ensure that they cease this reckless and dangerous conduct.

JOURNALIST:

Just on this partnership Prime Minister, is there any numbers in terms of people we are willing to commit or dollars we might be committing? And was this something that we offered or did the Indians request our assistance in this field?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it's grown out of quite a long engagement. Obviously Australia and India have a very close sporting relationship not least through cricket, I mean, John Gloster for example has been here for 13 years so that's one of the people-to-people links that have been so important.

But this is a key priority of Prime Minister Modi and when he sought to identify a country that would, who could partner with India he saw Australia as being the best candidate, the partner of choice in this area.

So India will set up, as you heard, an elite sporting university, like the Australian Institute of Sport, they will set up an organisation like that and we're helping them with that. But of course you've got programs at universities here which will cooperate with Australian universities on sports

medicine, on sports conditioning, on sports management. This is a big part of the equation too and you've got three, three of our vice-chancellors are here today, all very keen to work more closely with India in this regard.

You know education is a massive export for Australia and its close to \$2.5 billion worth of education exports to India. 60,000 students, Indian students in Australia at the moment. As you know we are the second most preferred destination for Indian students studying abroad after the US.

So this is a very important relationship at every level, whether you measure it from an economic point of view or from a social or educational point of view.

JOURNALIST:

Deloitte has had a look at what might happen to the Australian economy were there a downturn in China, some scary numbers, I think \$900 billion in lost Australian wealth from home prices slumping and half a million more jobless and the like. What are the risks of that happening in your judgement and is Deloitte right to paint such a grim picture?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, China is our largest trading partner. The relationship is \$150 billion a year, two-way trade, so a serious setback in the Chinese economy would be negative, would have a negative effect on Australia. But frankly it would have a negative effect on almost every economy.

China is a huge part of the global economy now. The impact of a big, really serious turn down in China would be large.

But having said that, there's no reason to forecast that. Chinese growth has remained strong and stronger frankly than many economists predicted a few years ago.

The Chinese economy is transitioning from one that was very heavily dependent, overwhelmingly dependent on investment to one that is more broad based and that is driven more, as economies are in most parts of the world particularly in developed world, by consumer demand.

Now that of course offers enormous opportunities for Australia as well.

The concern has been that as China makes that switch, that rebalance, is there going to be a big slow down? That's always been the concern. So far the transition is going relatively smoothly and China is maintaining strong economic growth.

So economists can paint a scenario but I am not right now, standing here today, I would not be forecasting a big slowdown in the Chinese economy. The transition that the government has been leading is working well and that is why you are seeing so much more demand for Australian exports, whether is education, whether it is tourism, whether it is food, whether it is wine and of course the enormous expansion of online shopping in China, it is the

biggest online commerce market in the world. That's given a lot of smaller Australian businesses more access. All of which is made possible by our China-Australia Free Trade Agreement so we are benefiting from this transition to a more consumer lead economy

JOURNALIST:

Should first home buyers be allowed to dip into their super to buy a house?

PRIME MINSITER:

About super? Look this is a debate that has gone round and round for a long time and I understand, I've read all of the speculation, standing here in Mumbai I won't contribute to it, although I've expressed fairly strong views about it in the past.

JOURNALIST:

You need to, I guess, say one way or another which view –

PRIME MINSITER:

The Budget is in May. Okay? There's a lot of speculation about the Budget, I understand that, but the budget is in May and all will be revealed.

But on that matter I have expressed strong views about it in the past.

JOURNALIST:

Are you looking forward to or reluctant to return to domestic issues? Excited or reluctant to return to domestic issues?

PRIME MINISTER:

It's been a wonderful trip here to India – it's been very productive.

I want to just say, you talk about excitement. Let me tell you about one new development. You would've seen yesterday we visited Tata Consulting Services which is a big technology, global technology company with a large business in Australia as well. They talked about their TCS labs, their innovation labs that they have around the world and I suggested to the Chief Executive Mr Gopinathan that he should have one in Australia. Well they've now confirmed that they are going to establish a TCS innovation lab in Australia. So that's great news because that will involve more research, more innovation, more work and that very creative end being done in Australia with some of our brightest minds and of course bright minds from all over the world including India.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister you got to spend quite a lot of time one-on-one with Prime Minister Modi –

PRIME MINISTER:

I did.

JOURNALIST:

And that seems to have actually got some tangible outcomes but now it's left up to the two countries respective bureaucracies to work on those. Do you think, are you confident that we will see progress at the rate that you want across a gamut of areas? Or do you think that you'll have to come back here or Modi will visit Australia more frequently to actually keep the momentum going?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well let me, let me deal with the free trade issue because I think that's what you're referring to.

Both of us recognised that progress had been slow. I think it's fair to say that there is a long tradition of protectionism in the Indian government system, if you like. Mr Modi recognises that, he is after all a reformer. He's seeking to shake up old practices and get India moving at a fast clip to succeed in the 21st century. So that's why we agreed that we would get our chief negotiators back to the table to set out very clearly what each side is asking for, where they're close, where they're far apart and where they've found agreement and then having done that come back to Prime Minister Modi and me so that we can then see what the progress is.

So we are taking a personal interest in this to ensure that we do get that level of urgency and focus that is needed.

That is the role of leaders to make sure that on both sides we get together and we find out whether we're talking about doing a deal or doing a deal and either way we've got to make some decisions so I think this is a very useful focus.

JOURNALIST:

So you're confident that momentum won't slow down now that you've kicked it along?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well because both sides, both sides have got to report back to their respective Prime Ministers, that's what provides the momentum – it concentrates the mind even in the most stately bureaucratic department.

JOURNALIST:

Mr Turnbull, what's wrong with Mr Shorten saying: "I support the Adani mine but I have doubts and concerns about Adani having \$900 million of taxpayers' money" to fund the rail link?

PRIME MINISTER:

As usual, Bill Shorten is trying to walk both sides of the street. You know, he's been traipsing around Queensland talking about jobs and now he is casting doubt on a project that will create tens of thousands of jobs. It is vitally important to Queensland's future, to Australia's economic future.

Look let me be very clear about this – I know there are many people in Bill Shorten's Party that on the left, on the Greens, the votes he's seeking from the Greens that don't want to have any more coal mining in Australia.

Well the reality is this – if we stop all of our coal mining today, all of our exports today, India would simply buy its coal, more coal, from Indonesia and South Africa. India has got a growing demand for coal, as you heard yesterday from the Energy Minister, Mr Goyal, yes they are moving on renewables in a very big way too. Very big commitment. And over time the proportion of coal fired energy will decline but in absolute terms their demand for coal is going to grow for many years. So this is a big opportunity and they're committed, they are going to deliver electricity 24x7 to every Indian. That's their commitment.

Now we can either be part of that and provide our cleaner coal to India or we can go down this Green ideological approach Bill Shorten is playing with to close off those opportunities for Australians and the coal will be bought from another market.

So Bill Shorten has got to decide whether he's all talk and no action, or whether he is really committed to jobs. Because what he's done there, he's gone on his bus around Queensland, talked a big game about jobs and then when there is the one big project that we know is going to add tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment, he walks away from it.

He lacks commitment, conviction and character on this.

Jobs are important.

He says they're important but what does he do? He's undermining a huge opportunity. What he's doing is undermining a huge opportunity for tens of thousands of jobs in Queensland and to no benefit.

As I said, if we stop exporting coal tomorrow all of the markets we sell coal to would simply buy it from somewhere else so it would not be one tonne less of coal burnt in the world.

So it's completely futile. We've either got to participate in this, create the jobs in the Australia with a cleaner low ash coal that India wants. They want our coal because it's the best coal, they want it and Bill Shorten should be backing our coal industry, backing our exports, backing jobs instead of walking away from them.

You can't walk both sides of the street on this and what he's done is made his whole Queensland trip into a farce. He's exposed it all as being nothing more than a bit of disingenuous show business.

When it came to the crunch he was not prepared to stand up for investment and

jobs in Queensland.

Thanks very much.

[ENDS]

Statement on the executions scheduled in Arkansas

Seven executions by lethal injection, scheduled by the US State of Arkansas for the period between 17 April and 27 April, would break the de-facto moratorium on the death penalty observed by this US State since November 2005. Arkansas would also become the first State in the US to conduct seven executions over an 11-day period since the resumption of the use of the death penalty in 1977 in the United States.

The European Union opposes capital punishment, which fails to act as a deterrent to crime, represents an unacceptable denial of human dignity and integrity and cannot be justified under any circumstances. More than 140 countries in the world are now abolitionist in law or practice.

Today, the death penalty is illegal in nineteen of the fifty US States and the District of Columbia. The number of executions in the US has steadily declined to its lowest level in 2016. The executions in Arkansas, if carried out as planned, would be a serious setback in this overall development.

We therefore call on the Governor of Arkansas to commute the sentences of Mr Bruce Earl Ward, Mr Don Williamson Davis, Mr Ledell Lee, Mr Stacey Eugene Johnson, Mr Jack Harold Jones, Mr Marcel W. Williams, Mr Kenneth D. Williams, as well as the sentence of Mr Jason F. McGehee, which has been temporarily stayed, and grant them relief from the death penalty.

Remarks of First Vice-President Frans Timmermans after the College discussion on legal issues relating to Hungary

The College today discussed the important issues of managing migration and

our internal security. Dimitris Avramopoulos and Vera Jourova will be in the press room shortly so I won't dwell on these points.

I just want to underline the importance of the Communication we have adopted on children in migration, which sets out the urgent actions needed to reinforce the protection of children in migration.

The aim is to ensure coordinated and effective protection of all migrant children at all stages of the process, so that the best interest of the child is always put first. Dimitris and Vera will explain in more detail what we are proposing.

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At Jean-Claude Juncker's initiative – and I very much welcome that – the College also discussed today a wide range of legal issues relating to Hungary.

Recent developments have led to publicly-voiced concerns from a wide range of stakeholders inside and outside the EU. Questions have been asked about the compatibility of certain actions of the Hungarian authorities with EU law and with our shared values.

Today's discussion allowed us to collectively take stock of the issues at hand, in an objective, facts-based and law-based manner.

The College will take decisions on some of the points discussed later this month. The Commission also decided today that it will prepare and make public its own response to the Hungarian Government's 'Stop Brussels' consultation.

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The recently adopted Higher Education Law is troubling many people in Europe's academic community, as well as politicians across Europe and beyond. It is perceived by many as an attempt to close down the Central European University.

President Juncker said very clearly earlier this week that he does not like this decision

My colleague Carlos Moedas expressed concern in a statement last week that the law might restrict scientific and academic freedom of thought, and our common values of openness, and that it might damage Hungary's academic reputation and relationship with EU partners.

Universities must be places where free thinking and diversity of opinions are cherished and nourished.

As Tibor Navracsics said last week, the Central European University is one of the most important universities not only in Hungary, but in the European Higher Education Area. I agree with Tibor on the importance of the Central European University being able to operate in Budapest undisturbed.

The College today agreed that where the new Law may touch on EU competences, and may also apply to EEA universities, we need to quickly complete a thorough legal assessment of its compatibility with free movement of services and the freedom of establishment, as well as EU rules on admission of third country researchers.

We will complete this legal assessment as soon as possible and the College will consider next steps on any legal concerns by the end of the month.

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You have also heard from my colleagues Margrethe Vestager and Vera Jourova in this press room in the past week, publicly expressing their concerns about recent developments in Hungary as regards European values.

Our shared European values are set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.

In our discussion in College, we looked across a range of issues which relate to the respect of these values in Hungary.

The draft legislation tabled last week by members of the governing party on the funding of so-called 'foreign' Non-Governmental Organisations is very much on our radar screen. We will be following it closely.

There can be legitimate public interest reasons for ensuring transparency of funding, but any measures need to be proportionate and must not create undue discrimination within the EU.

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We also spoke in the College about asylum, and respect for the values of human dignity, freedom, respect for human rights, tolerance and solidarity. The Commission has already expressed its concerns about the existing Hungarian law.

The new asylum law adopted by the national parliament at the end of March also raises serious doubts about compatibility with EU law. Dimitris Avramopoulos was in Budapest at the end of last month to raise our concerns and offered to share Commission expertise at technical level to quickly find ways to address these issues.

The College will keep a very close eye on whether timely progress can be made, and will act if we do not see positive developments soon.

As regards the values of equality and non-discrimination, the College continues to be attentive to the situation of the Roma in Hungary, and in particular to the timely resolution of the concerns we have expressed about discrimination against Roma children in education.

The protection of pregnant working women is also an area we have raised formally with the Hungarian authorities and as our concerns remain unanswered, the College will need to consider next steps later this month.

The College will review all these issues closely when it takes the next round of infringement decisions at the end of April.

Wherever individual cases are legally mature and our legal concerns remain unaddressed, we will move to the next steps.

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Respect for the values of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union applies to Member States more generally, even when they are not acting to implement EU law.

We have seen certain other developments that are relevant to common values such as human rights including human dignity, freedom and equality, and societies which are defined by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, and solidarity.

Today, looking at the broader picture – the overall spirit of Article 2 as well as the substance of the individual laws – the College resolved to use all the instruments at our disposal under the Treaties to uphold the values on which our Union is grounded.

The College unanimously agreed that a broader political dialogue between the Hungarian authorities, other Member States, and the European Parliament and Commission is now warranted.

Thank you very much

Remarks by Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos at the press conference on protecting children in migration and relocation and resettlement

Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos

Dear all,

I'm very glad to present to you today, – together with my colleague Vera Jourova – the priority actions for the protection of all children in migration.

Children are a very vulnerable group, but they are not a marginal group in the context of the current migratory situation in Europe.

Today, one in three asylum seekers in Europe is a child.

They need special protection wherever and whoever they are.

The best interests of the child should prevail at all times.

We want to ensure and improve the protection for ALL children at ALL stages of migration.

Every child is entitled to adequate treatment and protection, no matter what his or her legal status is.

We are of course not starting from scratch: both Member States and the EU level have put in place a strong migrant child protection framework in the past years.

But we need to shift gears – collectively. The protection of migrant children starts already before they arrive to the EU. The external and internal dimensions go hand in hand.

Over the past 2 years, we included migration in all our dialogues with third-countries but also at regional and global level. We are and will continue to invest in projects to protect migrant children outside Europe to ensure that they have access to healthcare and education.

We also have to protect children in migration more effectively at all stages inside the EU. We have to ensure that they are not at risk of being abused, that they are not exploited and do not go missing. We also have to avoid that children are drawn into criminal activities or radicalisation.

Our objective is that Member States give their endorsement to these actions over the coming months and that we work together to implement them.

The Commission will ensure that the funding available for the protection of the child is being fully used and that the EU agencies provide technical support to Member States.

Among the key actions, Member States have to ensure that the relocation and resettlement schemes work especially for unaccompanied minors.

This leads me to another point on today college agenda. Today we also adopted the 11th relocation and resettlement report.

We have already relocated more than 16,000 so far in total, of which more than 2,400 in the last reporting period.

With this, Member States, even though not all of them are participating, have set a new record on relocation.

Right now, we have around 14,000 eligible applicants in Greece and around 3,500 in Italy that are registered and ready to be relocated.

If Member States step-up the number of relocations, it is absolutely possible to relocate all those eligible in Greece and Italy by September.

To reach this objective our report today includes a number of recommendations for Member States. Now is the moment to sustain this progress, especially as regards the minors.

I am pleased that Austria will resume relocation and start with 50 vulnerable migrants including children from Italy.

On resettlement, we managed to resettle over two thirds of the 22,500 people to whom we committed to offer a safe legal path to Europe in July 2015. This is welcome news.

We are delivering on our commitment to share responsibility with third countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. We need to pursue our efforts to propose a viable alternative to irregular migration.

Finally, today we are also presenting our 6th monthly report on the Security Union. It comes in the aftermath of what is unfortunately yet another deadly terrorist attack on the European soil – Stockholm. Another attack which shows how urgently we must step-up our efforts to deliver a genuine and effective Security Union.

The emphasis of this report is on actions to combat organised crime – an area of criminal activity with frequent links to terrorism, drugs and firearms trafficking, migrant smuggling, cybercrime.

These are all priority policy areas with tangible impacts on the lives of our citizens.

Our work on organised crime and migrant smuggling is of course also closely linked to the protection of all children in migration.

I would like to pass the floor now to Vera, who will tell you more.