

European Agenda on Migration: Press Conference by Commissioner Avramopoulos on the progress made on managing migration and external borders

Dear all,

Migration continues to be one of the main preoccupations of the European Union and its citizens today. But as the reports we are presenting today clearly show, the difference between now and just two years ago, is like night and day.

While we still have many challenges ahead of us, both now and in the long term, we have already made enormous progress – achieving more in the past two years than what was possible in the twenty before it.

We are going towards a situation where we are structurally managing migration and our external borders, not just dealing with a crisis.

In Italy for example, arrivals in August this year dropped by 81% compared to the same month last year. And they dropped 66% just between July and August this very summer. This also reflects the positive work we have done along the Central Mediterranean Route with all partners involved, including first of all the authorities of Libya and Niger.

In Greece, the number of arrivals continues to represent a drop of around 97% since the entry into force of the EU-Turkey Statement. We have seen a slight increase over the summer, but this trend is not different than the usual seasonal changes like last summer.

Of course we must remain vigilant.

The EU-Turkey Statement continues to work and deliver results. More than 8,800 Syrians have been resettled from Turkey under this scheme since April 2016, including more than a thousand Syrians since the last reporting period.

So far in fact, since July 2015, the European Union has resettled more than 22,500 people in need of protection, not just from Turkey but also from countries like Lebanon and Jordan. This is a significant increase in resettlements compared to previous years, and it shows the value and success of joint EU efforts.

I have recently written to all Member States to encourage them to continue and be even more ambitious on resettlement, and also to focus more on the countries along the Central Mediterranean Route, in particular: Egypt, Libya,

Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan.

In addition, we have made considerable progress on better managing our external borders everywhere. The roll-out of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency has continued over the past months with two additional operations launched to assist Spain in the Western Mediterranean, where we have seen some increases in arrivals recently. Right now, more than 1,700 European Border and Coast Guard officers from all over Europe are on the ground, patrolling Europe's external borders, at land and at sea – this is European solidarity in action!

We have also made progress on return. Since the beginning of this year, more than 8608 illegally staying third-country nationals have been returned, with the support of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

But it is time that both the Agency and the Member States fully assume and use the Agency's new mandate on return.

Also in our cooperation with third countries, we have made progress on readmission, with for example Guinea and Gambia, and most recently with Bangladesh. Our approach on using all leverages, collectively as a Union, has clearly produced results in this cooperation, and shows the way forward.

We need to be bolder and collectively build a European return system.

Finally, I wish to conclude on the solidarity that we have shown within Europe so far through relocation. Not only have we reached an average of 2,300 relocation transfers per month since February 2017, we have now achieved almost 28,000 relocations from Italy and Greece.

There is however some misunderstanding that by now Member States would have been obliged to relocate more than 100,000 persons from Greece and Italy. But with the EU-Turkey Statement reducing irregular flows to Greece by 97% and the majority of migrants arriving in Italy not being eligible, in reality, the number of persons to be relocated has turned out to be much lower.

That does not change the fact that there are still several thousand people eligible to be relocated, from Greece and in particular from Italy, who will have arrived before 26 September. And the obligation to do so for Member States does not stop after that.

Let me be clear: the success of the relocation scheme will be measured against whether or not Member States relocate everyone eligible in Greece and in Italy.

Today, the European Court of Justice has confirmed the relocation decision. And more specifically, that:

- there was indeed an emergency situation characterised by a sudden inflow of displaced persons in Europe;
- the measures that we proposed through relocation are appropriate to address the situation: meaning, to help Greece and Italy cope with the impact of the migration crisis.

Now, there is no time to waste: all Member States should now focus on delivering on the relocation commitments.

Over the past two years, there has been some criticism and scepticism towards our comprehensive migration policy. But today we see the clear and effective results of a collective and joint Union policy on migration.

I call on all Member States and all our partners to continue delivering and building on the progress achieved to manage our borders, to provide protection to the most vulnerable, and to ensure that responsibility is shared fairly between Member States.

Because this is what solidarity looks like in practice.