

Declaration by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini on behalf of the EU on the occasion of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, 17 May 2018

On the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to combat all forms of discrimination and hate crime, on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, and to continue to actively promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

Inside and outside the European Union, LGBTI **persons** are too often targets of violence and hate crime. They are still the frequent subject of discrimination and maltreatment on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. In many countries having a partner of the same sex remains a crime. People are arrested, imprisoned, and in some cases executed, just because of the relationship they are in. Even in countries with legal protection of sexual orientation, **stigmatisation due to** homophobia, transphobia and biphobia remains high, leading to social exclusion with economic and health-related costs on societies.

2018 is an important year for human rights, as we mark the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its first article reads “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. LGBTI **persons** are no exception, and the EU will therefore continue to fight for “equal rights for all” regardless of sexual orientation.

Through a combination of political and human rights dialogues, awareness-raising activities, financial assistance and specific policy tools such as the “European Commission’s List of actions to advance LGBTI equality” and the EU “Guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by LGBTI persons” the European Union will continue to address discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and show the European Union’s commitment to advance LGBTI equality in the European Union and beyond.

The European Union pays tribute today to all those working to promote and protect the human rights of LGBTI persons. Allow us to reiterate that “Human rights Defenders, you are not alone and the European Union will always be with you”.

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[EU Visa Policy: Commission upgrades the Visa Information System](#)

□The Commission is today proposing to upgrade the Visa Information System (VIS), the database containing information on persons applying for Schengen visas, in order to better respond to evolving security and migratory challenges and improve the EU's external border management.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *"Every year, millions of non-EU nationals enter the EU with a visa, be it for a short stay or for a longer period. With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. Criminals and potential terrorists should not be able to come to Europe unnoticed. Europe is not a fortress – but we need to know who is crossing our borders. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith."*

Next steps

eu-LISA will be the EU Agency responsible for the development and management of the upgraded VIS database. As the final element of the EU visa policy reform, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to complete their legislative processes as swiftly as possible to close any remaining information gaps and facilitate travel to the EU for legitimate visitors.

Further readings

[Daily News 16 / 05 / 2018](#)

COLLEGE MEETING: Managing migration and upgrade of the Visa Information System

The Commission is today reporting on progress made under the [European Agenda on Migration](#) and the [Commission's roadmap](#) from December 2017, and is setting out further key actions to be taken. While joint EU efforts have continued to show results, the situation remains fragile due to ongoing migratory pressure, as evidenced by newly increased arrivals along the Eastern and the

Western Mediterranean routes. This requires the EU as a whole to show the necessary vigilance and preparedness to respond to any seasonal peaks or shifts in pressure, including from one route to another. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *“This report confirms that we can only manage migration in a comprehensive way, through mutually reinforcing actions that are based on responsibility and solidarity.”* The Commission is also today proposing to upgrade the Visa Information System (VIS), the database containing information on persons applying for Schengen visas, in order to better respond to evolving security and migratory challenges and improve the EU’s external border management. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *“With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith.”* A [press release](#) on the progress made under the European Agenda on Migration and factsheets on [migration management](#) and [Central Mediterranean Route](#) are available online. A [press release](#) on the upgrade of the Visa Information System and factsheets on the [Visa Information System \(VIS\)](#) and [EU Information Systems](#) are available online. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764)

RÉUNION DU COLLÈGE: Le Collège discute les questions d’actualité internationale et autres dossiers à la veille de la réunion informelle des dirigeants de Sofia

En préparation de la réunion informelle des dirigeants à Sofia, le 16 mai, le Collège des Commissaires a discuté des questions d’actualité incluant un compte rendu par la haute représentante / vice-présidente **Mogherini** concernant le suivi donné au retrait des Etats-Unis du programme nucléaire iranien et [les réunions UE/E3 et UE/E3 + Iran d’hier](#). La commissaire **Malmström** a informé le Collège – toujours dans le contexte des préparations de la réunion informelle – de l’état des lieux des relations commerciales entre l’Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. Dans un autre registre, le Premier vice-président **Timmermans** a fait un rapport sur les résultats du Conseil des Affaires générales du 14 mai concernant l’État de droit en Pologne, puis, le commissaire **Oettinger** a présenté les principales conclusions des rapports annuels d’activité des services de la Commission pour 2017, résumant les réalisations, les initiatives prises et les ressources financières et humaines déployées au cours de l’année. (Pour plus d’informations: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

COLLEGE MEETING: Three new female senior managers for the Juncker Commission

Today the European Commission decided to appoint a new female Deputy Secretary-General as well as two new female Deputy Directors-General in Directorate-General (DG) Trade. With today’s appointments, the Juncker Commission has more than tripled the number of female Deputy Directors-

General to 43% – up from just 11% in November 2014. Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen was appointed Deputy Secretary-General. A Danish national, Ms Ahrenkilde Hansen was already acting Deputy Secretary-General since March. Previously she has served as European Commission Spokeswoman from 1999-2009, as Chief Spokeswoman of the Commission from 2009 to 2014 and, thereafter, as Director of the Commission's Representations in the 28 Member States for more than 3 years, thus bringing a wide range of competences and management experience at senior level to her new position. Both new Deputy Directors-General in DG Trade currently hold senior management positions in that department where they have spent a large part of their professional careers, making them ideally suited for their new positions. Sandra Gallina, an Italian national, joined the Commission in 1988 has been a Director in DG Trade since 2015. Helena König, a Swedish national, joined the Commission in 1997 and has been a Director in DG Trade since 2015. All three decisions take effect immediately. Finally, the Commission also decided to extend the mandate of Marc Mouligneau as Director of the Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels (OIB) until 31 January 2019. Please see [here](#) and [here](#) for the CVs of the senior managers. (For more information: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 2 299 13 82)

COLLEGE MEETING: Visit by Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres

As part of his two day visit to Brussels, Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres will visit the European Commission today. At a bilateral meeting with President **Juncker**, the two leaders will discuss EU-UN relations, including the UN reform and implementing the [Sustainable Development Goals](#); foreign policy issues with a particular focus on Syria and advancing the trilateral European Union – United Nations – African Union cooperation on Libya; as well as global challenges, including climate change and migration. As President **Juncker** said ahead of the meeting: *“In times marked by volatility we pride ourselves in being a reliable and predictable interlocutor. Our longstanding partnership with the United Nations, covering all pillars of United Nations activity is stronger and more articulated than ever.”* Secretary-General Guterres will then join the College for a working lunch, before holding a joint press point with President **Juncker** at 13:30 CET, which will be [live on EbS+](#). See [here](#) for more information on EU – UN relations. (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

President Juncker participates in Leaders' Meeting and EU – Western Balkans Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria

President **Juncker** will participate today in an informal dinner of the EU28 leaders ahead of the [Western Balkans Summit](#) in Sofia, Bulgaria. In view of recent events, leaders are expected to discuss EU-US trade relations, the future of the Iran nuclear deal, as well as the EU's response to US announcements on the imposition of sanctions and how to best protect the economic interests of European companies. In the context of the Leaders' Agenda agreed in October 2017, discussions will also focus on research and

innovation and on the actions necessary to complete the Digital Single Market. The European Commission presented yesterday its contributions with a [Renewed European Agenda for Research and Innovation](#) and a set of [concrete actions](#) to protect citizens' privacy and make the EU's [Digital Single Market](#) a reality before the end of 2018. On 17 May, the EU-Western Balkans Summit will take place bringing together the Heads of State or Government of EU Member States and their counterparts from the Western Balkans. In addition to President **Juncker**, High Representative/Vice President **Mogherini**, Commissioner **Hahn** and Commissioner **Gabriel** will also take part. This is the first Summit with Western Balkan leaders for the last 15 years. Following on the [Commission's Western Balkans Strategy](#) released in February this year and President **Juncker's** visit to the region, the Summit will reaffirm the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The main points of discussion will be physical and human connectivity within the region and with the EU and addressing better shared challenges such as security and migration. As a concrete outcome of the Summit, EU Leaders are expected to adopt a Sofia Summit Declaration with follow-up actions. In the margins of the Summit, the Western Balkans partners will also sign a Statement of Support for a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans – one of the [six flagships](#) of the Commission's Western Balkans Strategy. For more information on [the way forward between the EU and the Western Balkans](#) and their [economic relations](#) please see our dedicated factsheets. More information related to the Summit and the Leaders' meeting is available in the factsheets on the [Digital Single Market](#), [Data Protection](#) and the [Western Balkans](#). A press conference by President **Juncker**, President Tusk and Prime Minister Borissov will follow the Summit, timing to be confirmed. Watch live on EbS [here](#). (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

World Trade Organisation rejects vast majority of US claims in Airbus dispute

The WTO Appellate Body yesterday rejected 94% of the US allegations in the dispute on support to Airbus and dismissed all US claims that any of the EU support is outright prohibited under WTO rules. Commissioner **Malmström** said: *"The WTO Appellate Body, the highest WTO court, has agreed that the EU has largely complied with its original findings. Significantly, it dismissed the vast majority of the US claims that this support had damaged Boeing's aircraft sales. The EU will now take swift action to ensure it is fully in line with the WTO's final decision in this case. Also, we look forward to the upcoming ruling by the Appellate Body on US compliance with the WTO findings of the massive and persistent government support to Boeing."* Yesterday's ruling leaves the EU with only a few remaining compliance obligations. The EU will now take swift action to bring itself into line with WTO rules as regards these remaining points. The initial case was initiated by the US in 2004 against support provided to Airbus by France, Germany, Spain and the UK for the development and production of its series of large civil aircrafts. Today's step marks the end of those compliance proceedings as the Appellate Body is the highest WTO court. The EU launched a parallel case against US government support for Boeing aircraft in 2005. In that case we are also at the stage of the compliance proceedings after the EU argued before the WTO that the US had not made any efforts to remove its own subsidies. For more information see the [WTO report](#) and the Commission [press release](#). (For more

information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel.: +32 229 51383)

Eurostat: Demandeurs d'asile considérés comme mineurs non accompagnés: Plus de 31 000 mineurs non accompagnés parmi les demandeurs d'asile dans l'UE en 2017, les Afghans demeurent les principaux demandeurs

En 2017, 31 400 demandeurs d'asile sollicitant une protection internationale dans les États membres de l'Union européenne (UE) étaient considérés comme étant des mineurs non accompagnés. C'est près de la moitié du nombre enregistré en 2016 (63 200 mineurs non accompagnés enregistrés) et presque un tiers du pic enregistré en 2015 (95 200). Cela reste toutefois plus de deux fois et demi plus élevé que la moyenne annuelle relevée sur la période 2008-2013 (environ 12 000 par an). Globalement dans l'UE, les mineurs non accompagnés représentaient 15% de l'ensemble des demandeurs d'asile âgés de moins de 18 ans en 2017. En 2017, une majorité de ces mineurs non accompagnés étaient des garçons (89%) et plus des deux-tiers étaient âgés de 16 à 17 ans (77%, soit quelque 24 200 personnes), tandis que ceux âgés de 14 à 15 ans représentaient 16% des mineurs non accompagnés (environ 5 500 personnes) et ceux de moins de 14 ans 6% (près de 2 000 personnes). Les Afghans (17%, soit environ 5 300 personnes) sont restés la principale nationalité des demandeurs d'asile considérés comme mineurs non accompagnés dans l'UE. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (*For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423*)

Concentrations: la Commission autorise l'acquisition de Delsey par Avenue Capital, Pemberton et Permira

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement sur les concentrations, l'acquisition de Delsey basée en France par Avenue Capital basée aux Etats-Unis, Pemberton basée au Luxembourg et Permira basée au Royaume-Uni. Delsey commercialise des bagages de marque et d'autres accessoires de voyages. Avenue Capital est une entreprise d'investissement spécialisée. Pemberton est une société de gestion d'actifs principalement présente dans la dette privée et les prêts directs. Permira est une société de fonds de placement qui fournit des services de gestion de participation à des fonds d'investissement. La Commission a conclu que l'opération ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence au regard des chevauchements limités entre les activités des entreprises dans les marchés directement concernés ou connexes. L'opération a été examinée selon la procédure simplifiée de contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le [site concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans le [registre public des affaires](#), sous le numéro [M.8886](#). (*Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740*)

Eurostat: Le taux d'inflation annuel en baisse à 1,2% dans la zone euro et en

baisse à 1,4% dans l'UE en Avril 2018

Le taux d'inflation annuel de la zone euro s'est établi à 1,2% en avril 2018, contre 1,3% en mars. Un an auparavant, il était de 1,9%. Le taux d'inflation annuel de l'Union européenne s'est établi à 1,4% en avril 2018, contre 1,5% en mars. Un an auparavant, il était de 2,0%. Les taux annuels les plus faibles ont été observés à Chypre (-0,3%), en Irlande (-0,1%) et au Portugal (0,3%). Les taux annuels les plus élevés ont quant à eux été enregistrés en Roumanie (4,3%), en Slovaquie (3,0%) ainsi qu'en Estonie (2,9%). Par rapport à mars 2018, l'inflation annuelle a baissé dans douze États membres, est restée stable dans un et a augmenté dans quatorze autres. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 229 50055; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Blue Invest: Bringing together start-ups and investors in the maritime economy

On 17 May, the Commission is organising [Blue Invest](#), the first-ever, EU-wide matchmaking event between start-ups and investors in the maritime economy. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen** and Commissioner **Vella** will welcome hundreds of entrepreneurs and investors from across Europe in Brussels. Commissioner **Vella** said: *"Our experience shows that matching the right maritime start-up to the right investor can create an ocean of opportunity. That is the goal of Blue Invest. The huge turn-out at Blue Invest illustrates how the European Commission is at the forefront of ocean investment."* Companies will receive advice from European Investment Bank Vice-President Jonathan Taylor, industry leaders and financial services experts about scaling up their business and raising interest from potential investors. The 'blue economy' includes activities from aquaculture and tourism, to ocean energy and biotechnology. As a whole, the sector is growing faster than the rest of the EU economy and it has the potential to double its size, supporting 7 million direct jobs and creating €1 trillion in turnover by 2030. Vice-President **Katainen** added: *"Boosting investment is a core priority for this Commission. The Investment Plan's European Fund for Strategic Investments has already catalysed investments worth over €280 billion in Europe."* More information available [here](#). (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321)

Commissioner Andriukaitis in Croatia to discuss issues of common interest on health and food safety with civil society

On 16 – 17 May, Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food safety will be in Croatia to meet with Mr Milan Kujundžić, Minister of Health and Mr Tomislav Tolušić, Minister of Agriculture. On 17 May in Zagreb, the Commissioner will attend a meeting at the Croatian Parliament with the Members of the Committees for European Affairs, Agriculture and Health. Commissioner **Andriukaitis** will hold a Citizens' Dialogue alongside Mr Tomislav Tolušić, Minister of Agriculture, webstream available [here](#). In Dubrovnik, he will attend the 60th Annual General Assembly of CLITRAVI

(Liaison Centre for the Meat Processing Industry in the EU). Ahead of the visit Commissioner **Andriukaitis** said *“I am looking forward to discussing key issues of common interest such as animal health, animal welfare, antimicrobial resistance, and food labelling”*. (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostolo – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

Commissioner Avramopoulos in Vienna to prepare upcoming EU Presidency of Austria

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** will be in Vienna tomorrow to meet with Minister of Interior Herbert Kickl, Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl and Minister within the Federal Chancellery for the EU, Arts, Culture and Media Gernot Blümel. Discussions will focus on Austria’s priorities under its upcoming EU Presidency as well as migration and security. In the morning, Commissioner **Avramopoulos** will take part in an EU-Citizens’ Dialogue on the “Future of the EU: Challenges for a humanitarian Europe? Migration, solidarity and security in the EU.” More information on the Citizen’s Dialogue [here](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 58602)

Commissioner Crețu in the Republic of Moldova, on EU support to the country’s regional development

Tomorrow until Monday, Commissioner for regional policy Corina **Crețu** is in the Republic of Moldova. In Chișinău the Commissioner will meet Pavel Filip, Prime Minister, Liviu Volconovici, Minister of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment and Iurie Leanca, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration. Commissioner **Crețu** will also meet several representatives of the civil society, of political parties, business partners and senior EU officials working for the country’s regional development. On Saturday, the Commissioner will visit Ungheni, chosen to be one of the [2018 European Villages](#), where citizens can learn about EU support to the country, especially through EU-funded projects developed in their region. Commissioner **Crețu** said: *“My visit will focus on how cohesion policy, especially via the [Danube macro-regional strategy](#) and our cross border cooperation programmes, can support regional development and economic growth in the Republic of Moldova.”* (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

[European Agenda on Migration: Still](#)

fragile situation gives no cause for complacency

While joint EU efforts have continued to show results, the situation remains fragile due to ongoing migratory pressure, as evidenced by newly increased arrivals along the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean routes. This requires the EU as a whole to show the necessary vigilance and preparedness to respond to any seasonal peaks or shifts in pressure, including from one route to another. Today's report identifies where the current response needs to be strengthened: plugging persistent gaps in assets for the European Border and Coast Guard; improving returns; boost resettlement; and better protecting migrants along the routes.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"This report confirms that we can only manage migration in a comprehensive way, through mutually reinforcing actions that are based on responsibility and solidarity. A reformed Common European Asylum System is a central part of this approach and together with the EU's long term budget the EU will be ready to deal with any future migratory crisis. This reform cannot wait and I hope the European Council will be able to reach a deal in June."*

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *"In the last years important progress has been made both within the EU and with our partner countries. However, the situation is still fragile and our work is far from over. This is why I call on Member States to urgently send border guards and equipment for the European Border and Coast Guard operations, but also to follow through on their commitment to reach an agreement on our asylum reform in June. We are once again reminded that we have absolutely no time to waste."*

Arrivals along the three main routes

During the first months of 2018, the downward trend of 2017 has continued in the **Central Mediterranean** with arrival figures around 77% lower than those recorded in the same period in 2017.

While still drastically lower than before the EU-Turkey Statement, **arrivals from Turkey** have seen a significant increase since March 2018 both to the Greek islands (9,349 since the beginning of 2018) and via the land border (6,108 so far in 2018 – nine times more than during the same period in 2017). While the situation has overall stabilised along the **Western Balkan route**, increased movements through Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been reported in recent months.

Arrivals on the **Western Mediterranean** route continued to show an upward trend with around 6.623 arrivals in Spain since January 2018 (22 % higher than in the first months of 2017).

Managing the EU's external borders

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency is presently supporting national border guards with around 1,350 deployed experts along all migratory routes. In view of the increased migratory pressure, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency stands ready to **reinforce its presence on the land border between Greece and Turkey**. The Agency has also offered to triple its operational deployments at the Greek land borders with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition, work is advancing to conclude agreements with Western Balkan countries that will allow the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to assist them directly in managing their borders when needed.

However, there are **persistent and significant gaps** in personnel and equipment for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency – to the point that less than half of the current operational needs can be met. Member States must **urgently step up their deployment** if the Agency is to sustain ongoing operations or be in a position to engage in new ones.

The Commission's proposal for the **next long-term budget** significantly reinforces the funds dedicated to external border management, including additional resources to strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard with an envisaged standing corps of 10,000.

Protecting migrants along the route

The EU is continuing its work to address root causes of migration while protecting migrants along the route and offering alternatives to irregular migration:

- **Voluntary returns from Libya:** With EU support, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has assisted more than 6,185 people in voluntarily returning home from Libya in 2018 alone. The AU–EU–UN Taskforce continues to work with the Libyan authorities to stop the systematic detention of migrants, including children. So far this year, over 1,000 refugees have been released from detention thanks to these efforts.
- **Emergency evacuations:** 1,152 people have been evacuated from Libya to Niger through the Emergency Transit Mechanism for further resettlement to Europe. 108 of them have already been resettled to France, Sweden and Switzerland. Referrals by the UNHCR should now be accelerated to speed up transfers to EU Member States. The EU supports this effort with €20 million.
- **Tackling migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks:** Cooperation is being enhanced with partners in the Sahel, in line with the [Declaration](#) adopted in Niamey in March.
- **Addressing root causes:** The EU Trust Fund for Africa has proved its worth, with 147 programmes, for a total amount of €2.59 billion so far, funding crucial initiatives such as voluntary returns from Libya. However, a significant funding gap of around €1.2 billion risks crippling these efforts if not addressed together by the EU and Member States.

The Commission is also proposing today a [revision of the legislation on Immigration Liaison Officers](#) deployed by EU Member States to non-EU countries to help intensify the EU dimension of coordination with crucial partners.

Conditions in Greece

Conditions in Greece remain a **serious concern** with heavy pressure on the islands and the slow pace of asylum procedures hampering returns to Turkey. The Commission has called on Greece to improve conditions on the islands with EU support; urgently accelerate the pace of returns; and finalise their **contingency plan** for increased arrivals.

Return and readmission

More work is needed to increase return of those migrants who have no right to stay in the EU as **only 36.6%** of return orders in 2017 were actually carried out. The **European Border and Coast Guard Agency** helped organise 111 return operations in 2018 but Member States should make much greater use of the Agency's boosted mandate on returns. Significant progress is being made in improving **cooperation on return with countries of origin**, with several practical arrangements concluded over the past months and further negotiations on-going. To further improve the monitoring of returns and other relevant migration statistics, the [Commission is also proposing today to increase Eurostat's frequency of data publications](#).

Resettlement

Under the Commission's **new resettlement scheme**, 20 Member States have pledged more than 50,000 places, out of which 4,252 transfers have already taken place. The Commission is calling on Member States to carry out **50% of the pledged resettlements by October 2018**.

Next steps

To sustain the EU's comprehensive approach on migration and ensure Europe is equipped to deal with any future crisis, Member States should now:

- Fill gaps in border guards and equipment for the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency**;
- Fill the €1.2 billion gap in funding for the **EU Trust Fund for Africa**;
- Improve **conditions in Greece** and accelerate returns to Turkey;
- **Significantly step up returns** and make use of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency's mandate to assist with returns;
- **Accelerate resettlement** efforts under the new scheme for priority countries, in particular as concerns the Emergency Transit Mechanism in Niger, as well as under the EU-Turkey Statement;
- Swiftly reach an agreement on the **reform of the Common European Asylum System**, to ensure the EU is prepared to deal with any future crises.

Background

On 13 May 2015, the European Commission proposed a far-reaching strategy, through the [European Agenda on Migration](#), to tackle the immediate challenges

of the ongoing crisis, as well as to equip the EU with the tools to better manage migration in the medium and long term, in the areas of irregular migration, borders, asylum and legal migration.

Today's Communication presents the developments since March 2018 and reports on progress made under the European Agenda on Migration and the Commission's political roadmap towards a comprehensive migration agreement [presented in December 2017](#).

For More Information

[Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration](#)

[Statistical Annexes](#)

[Factsheet – Migration Management – EU Crisis Management tools](#)

[Factsheet – Central Mediterranean Route: Protecting migrants and managing irregular flows](#)

Proposal for a [Regulation on the creation of a European Network of immigration liaison officers](#)

[EU Visa Policy: Commission upgrades the Visa Information System to better secure the EU's external borders](#)

The proposed changes will allow for more thorough background checks on visa applicants; close security information gaps through better information exchange between Member States; and ensure full interoperability with other EU-wide databases.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *“Every year, millions of non-EU nationals enter the EU with a visa, be it for a short stay or for a longer period. With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. Criminals and potential terrorists should not be able to come to Europe unnoticed. Europe is not a fortress – but we need to know who is crossing our borders. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith.”*

The Visa Information System (VIS) is an EU database which connects border guards at the EU's external borders with Member States' consulates across the

world. It provides visa issuing authorities with key information on applicants for short-stay Schengen visas while allowing border guards to detect travellers that may pose security risks. Today's proposal expands the scope of the VIS – notably by adding long stay-visas and residence permits to the system – in full respect of data protection rules, to ensure that these authorities have the information they need, when they need it. The proposal is the second step of the reform of the common EU visa policy and follows the amendments to the Visa Code, presented by the Commission in [March 2018](#).

Enhancing security and closing information gaps

The proposed upgrade of the VIS database will enhance internal security and improve border management through the following measures:

- **Enhanced security checks across all databases:** All visa applications recorded in the VIS will now be automatically checked against all other EU information systems for security and migration, such as the newly established Entry-Exit System (EES), the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), through a Single Search Portal. This obligatory crosscheck will detect applicants using multiple identities and identify anyone posing security or irregular migration risks;
- **Better data and information exchange:** Currently no information is held at EU level on long-stay visas and residence permits. The proposed upgrades will extend the scope of the VIS to also include such information. This will allow border guards to quickly determine whether a long-stay visa or a residence permit used to cross the Schengen external borders is valid and in the hands of its legitimate holder – closing an important security gap;
- **More efficient return procedures:** From now on, copies of the visa applicant's travel document will also be included in the VIS database. This measure, coupled with the authorisation for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency staff to have access to the VIS, will facilitate the identification and readmission of undocumented irregular migrants, thereby increasing the efficiency of the EU's return policy;
- **Strengthened capacity to prosecute and prevent crime :** Law enforcement authorities and Europol will now have a more structured access to the VIS for the prevention, detection or investigation of terrorist offences or other serious crimes, under strict conditions and in full respect of the EU's data protection rules. Access to the VIS will be also opened to law enforcement authorities for the purpose of searching or identifying missing or abducted persons and victims of trafficking.

Next steps

The eu-LISA will be the EU Agency responsible for the development and management of the upgraded VIS database. As the final element of the EU visa policy reform, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to complete their legislative processes as swiftly as possible to close any remaining information gaps and facilitate travel to the EU for legitimate visitors.

Background

The common EU visa policy facilitates travel to the EU for tourism and business purposes, contributing to the EU's economy and growth and intercultural connections and dialogue. In 2016 alone, almost 14 million Schengen visas were issued for short stay visits (see the [latest statistics](#) on Schengen visas).

Since the entry into force of the [Visa Code in 2010](#), the environment in which visa policy operates has drastically changed. In recent years, the EU has been faced with new migration and security challenges. In [September 2017](#), the Commission announced it would come forward with ideas on how to modernise the EU's common visa policy. The Commission confirmed it would propose a revision of the Visa Code in its [Work Programme for 2018](#) and delivered on this commitment in [March 2018](#).

At the same time, the EU is upgrading its information systems for security and border management in order to close information gaps and enhance internal security. Following up on the [Council conclusions from June 2017](#), the Commission presented in [December 2017](#) a proposal to make EU information systems work together in a more efficient and intelligent way. Today's proposal upgrades the VIS and lays the foundation for the system to become fully interoperable with other EU databases for border and migration management

For More Information

[Factsheet](#) – Upgrading the Visa Information System (VIS)

[Factsheet](#) – EU Information Systems

Proposal for a [new Regulation on the Visa Information System](#)

[Press Release](#) – EU Visa Policy: Commission puts forward proposals to make it stronger, more efficient and more secure

[Press Release](#) – Security Union: Commission closes information gaps to better protect EU citizens