

Statement by the Spokesperson on political tensions in Zambia

Political tensions in Zambia have increased over past weeks and in particular with the events surrounding the arrest of opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema in recent days.

Calm and to refrain from any actions and rhetoric likely to aggravate the situation are much needed.

The Zambian people expect all parties to engage in dialogue to contribute to a peaceful and democratic society and to respect the rule of law.

Statement by Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn on the latest developments in Albania

We regret the parliamentary boycott in Albania and that the opposition has not yet registered to participate in the elections. The political debate should not take place outside, but inside the parliament according to democratic practise. Citizens deserve responsible leadership.

We once again urge all political leaders to act responsibly, with respect for institutions, and pave the way for democratic elections, in line with international standards.

More specifically, the much needed justice reform in Albania has once again come under attack. We call on all parties to complete the formation of the vetting institutions. Attacking the judicial reform rather than ensuring implementation of vetting, with close monitoring of the International Monitoring Operation, harms Albania's present and future.

We expect that Members of the Parliament will show responsibility, capacity to act within the democratic legitimate institutional framework, and that they stand by the people of Albania, who continue to demand that the vetting is launched and the judiciary eventually reformed, also as a crucial step for the country to join the European Union.

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.