

Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos following the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Luxembourg

Dear all,

I wish to thank Minister Ohisalo for steering today's very fruitful discussions in a marathon session of the Council.

I also want to take the opportunity to mention that today was my last Home Affairs Council under my mandate as European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship.

At the end of my term, I am proud to have built very strong relations with my interior minister colleagues, who in my opinion have the most difficult job among other Ministers in the world.

It is no understatement to say that both security and migration have continuously been at the top of our European and global political agendas over the past 5 years. The migration crisis coincided with several terrorist attacks on European soil. Both phenomena have put into question Europe's unity and fundamental principles.

At that time Europe and its Member States were taken by surprise. It was my duty in the beginning to build everything almost from scratch, with the support and help of Member States, my colleagues in the Commission and of course the European Parliament. Today, we are not where we were five years ago. But still, a lot has to be done. Both issues will be here for many years but now Europe is better prepared.

While of course our joint work is not finished yet, we can safely look back and acknowledge that collectively we have built the strong foundations of a Security Union and of a revamped border and migration management structure.

Today more specifically, we took stock of where we stand in our work to keep Europeans safe, online and offline.

We discussed how to better fight violent far right-wing extremism, countering hybrid threats and address the challenges and opportunities new technologies represent for security by enhancing exchange of information and cooperation at operational level through our agencies such as Europol.

We fully support the Ministers' calls for continued efforts in combating the sexual abuse of children, and I am confident that this will lead to concrete results to better prevent and investigate these horrible crimes, as well as to better protect victims.

Together with Ministers, we also looked at the state of play on all migratory routes to the EU, on which we should continue all our efforts. Overall, the

situation is back to pre-crisis levels, but we must remain vigilant.

The situation in the Eastern Mediterranean is worrying. This is why I travelled to Turkey and to Greece last week together with the German Minister of Interior Mr Seehofer, unfortunately Mr Castaner could not join us due to the tragic events in Paris, to ensure we continue working, as partners, to manage the situation together.

All sides remain fully committed to continue implementing the EU-Turkey Statement – this is a shared responsibility that both the EU and Turkey will continue to honour.

Regarding the Central Mediterranean, irregular arrivals are very low and we should keep it that way.

I would like to commend Malta and Italy for the work they are doing. In addition to Malta and Italy, we continue to support Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria politically, financially and operationally. So far, we are counting over 1000 voluntary relocations following disembarkations since summer 2018 already – this is a sign of very tangible solidarity.

Last month in Malta, together with France, Germany, Italy and Malta, we have made a first step towards more predictable, workable and practical solutions in case disembarkations take place in Europe. Today, we discussed the Malta outcome with all the Member States. The atmosphere during the lunch was constructive.

Solidarity is a value on which the EU is based and that has to be put in practice. Today we discussed how to move forward together and this needs to be continued. Of course, ultimately, a structural and permanent solution, embedded in a reformed Common European Asylum System is the only viable solution. I call on all Member States now to advance in a European spirit.

In the meantime, we need to continue building strong partnerships with countries of transit and origin, and to show that we are committed. In this context, I am very encouraged about the EU's resettlement efforts. More than 75% of the 50,000 pledges have already materialised. This shows that Europe is ready to take its responsibility.

I wish to stress that we are also constantly monitoring all routes. On the Western Mediterranean route, the situation has improved thanks to our, and in particular Spain's, strategic partnership with Morocco, which we must continue.

Finally, I wish to thank the Finnish Presidency as well as the 10 previous Council Presidencies I was lucky to work with under my mandate for our constructive cooperation throughout the last 5 years. Five very difficult years.

Overall, we have built a more resilient Union, one that is able to address crises of different sorts. As I mentioned earlier, we have created the foundations on which the EU can continue to build a stronger and more resilient home for all of us: whether it is through the reinforced European

Border and Coast Guard, or by making our information systems interoperable, or by operationally and financially supporting our Member States under pressure.

These are our common achievements and we can be proud of what we have accomplished together.

I am sure that our successors will continue doing even more, improving what they have inherited, and delivering, as we have been trying to do during the last 5 years.

As I said in the beginning, I am more than proud to have served our common European home and I was very happy to collaborate so closely with Commissioner King, who has done a great job.

Thank you.