



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Mr Yiannakis OMIROU

President of the

Vouli ton Antiprosopon

CY – 1402 NICOSIA

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Vouli ton Antiprosopon for its Opinion on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a crisis relocation mechanism and amending Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanism for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application of international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third country national or a stateless person {COM(2015) 450 final}. The Commission also notes the comments and concerns expressed in the position of the Parliamentary Group AKEL Left – New Forces, forwarded with the Opinion.

The proposal forms part of a broader package of ambitious measures that the Commission has proposed to respond to the current refugee crisis and to prepare for future challenges, in line with its European Agenda on Migration. The temporary emergency relocation schemes from Italy and Greece that have been adopted in the meantime by the Council¹ are also part of this package.

The Commission welcomes the Vouli ton Antiprosopon's broad support for a joint action by all Member States to find adequate solutions to the current refugee and migratory crisis, based on solidarity and a fair sharing of responsibility. It is in this spirit that on 4 May the Commission presented a first package of proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System by creating a fairer, more efficient and more sustainable system for allocating asylum applications among Member States. The basic principle for the reformed Dublin regulation² will remain the same – asylum seekers should, unless they have family elsewhere, apply for asylum in the first country they enter – but a new fairness mechanism will ensure no Member State is left with a disproportionate pressure on its asylum system. That mechanism would be automatically triggered as soon as a Member State carries a disproportionate burden,

¹ Council Decisions (EU) 2015/1523, of 14 September 2015, and 2015/1601, of 22 September 2015.

² COM(2016) 270 final

meaning that this Member State would be responsible for examining applications for more than 150% of its reference share.

The Commission shares the views of the Vouli ton Antiprosopon regarding the importance of policies for preventing migratory flows and addressing their root causes. The external and internal dimensions of migration are very much intertwined. EU action has focused both on addressing the root causes of intensified migration flows and on removing the need for refugees to make the perilous journey to Europe by helping them closer to home. It has also focused on enhancing cooperation on migration management with third countries. The actions of the EU in this regard, including diplomatic efforts, development and humanitarian aid, are discussed in detail in the Commission Communication of 10 February 2016 on the State of Play of Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration.³ On 7 June, the Commission will present a Communication to operationalise and take further the external aspects of the European Agenda on Migration.

The humanitarian imperative and fundamental rights are guiding principles of the EU approach to refugees and migrants. These are the drivers for many of the specific actions under way: search and rescue in the Mediterranean and the Aegean, work with the Member States faced with a large influx of refugees to improve their reception capacity, and measures to assist Member States with the integration of migrants. Further details on these measures can also be found in the Commission Communication of 10 February 2016.

In addition, on 18 May the Commission adopted its latest progress report on the EU's emergency relocation and resettlement schemes⁴, assessing actions taken up to 13 May 2016. Overall, progress remains unsatisfactory since the Commission's second report, despite signs of increased preparation for future action: few relocations have taken place since mid-April, though the pipeline of future relocations has been strengthened. Progress has been made on resettlement as part of the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, but must be accelerated to avoid migrants returning to irregular routes. Greater efforts on relocation are increasingly urgent in view of the humanitarian situation in Greece and the increase in arrivals to Italy.

The Commission fully shares the importance that the Vouli ton Antiprosopon attaches to preserving the Schengen system, which in recent months has been severely tested by the refugee crisis. On 4 March 2016 the Commission adopted a Communication "Back to Schengen – A Roadmap"⁵ setting out the concrete steps needed to return order to the management of the EU's external and internal borders. Our aim is to lift controls at internal borders as temporarily reintroduced in view of the migratory crisis, as quickly as possible, and by December 2016 at the latest.

The Commission shares the views of the Vouli ton Antiprosopon on the need for the acceleration of procedures regarding the establishment and operation of hotspots. The Communication of 10 February 2016 states that making hotspots fully operational now is essential and sets out steps

³ COM(2016) 85 final

⁴ Communication from the Commission – Third report on relocation and resettlement, COM(2016) 360 final

⁵ COM(2016) 120 final

to be taken as a matter of urgency to achieve this aim. On 4 March 2016, the Commission adopted a detailed Progress report on the implementation of the hotspot approach in Greece and Italy.⁶

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Vouli ton Antiprosopon, and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Dimitris Avramopoulos
Member of the Commission*

⁶ COM(2016) 141 final