



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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C(2015) 4927 final*

*Mr Claude BARTOLONE
President of the
Assemblée nationale
Palais Bourbon
126, rue de l'Université
F – 75007 PARIS*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Assemblée nationale for its Opinion calling for a strengthening of the European policies countering irregular migration, particularly in the Mediterranean Sea.

The Commission is deeply concerned by the worsening migratory and humanitarian crisis that is affecting the Mediterranean and firmly committed to address it without delay.

That is why the Commission has put forward in the European Agenda on Migration, which was adopted on 13 May 2015¹, a comprehensive approach to the immediate and structural challenges of migration and asylum policy.

This comprehensive approach is underpinned by the commitment to respect fundamental rights of migrants, including respect of the non-refoulement principle, at all stages of their journey and irrespective of their migratory status, and in particular in the actions carried out to prevent and reduce irregular flows to the EU, in line with what was stressed in the Opinion.

The agenda translates the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility into effective actions.

Europe cannot stand by whilst lives are being lost. Search and rescue efforts will be stepped up to restore the level of intervention provided under the former Italian 'Mare Nostrum' operation. The budget and assets for the Frontex joint-operations Triton and Poseidon was tripled.

This is not enough. The challenge is also to find a way that would enable people under threat to seek protection without risking their lives. Any measures taken in that regard should address the roots of the problem and should not become an incentive to undertake a perilous journey across the Mediterranean.

¹ COM(2015) 240 final.

Let us assure you that, in this context, the transposition and implementation of the recast instruments of the Common European Asylum System is a priority for the Commission.

The Commission has also continuously called on the Member States to step up their engagement in resettlement activities, including through the pledging in the framework of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The need for a common approach to granting protection to displaced persons in need of protection is underlined in the European Agenda on Migration. On 27 May 2015, the Commission adopted a Recommendation proposing an EU-wide resettlement scheme to offer 20,000 places. This scheme would cover all Member States and distribution criteria are proposed.

Reinforced dialogue and cooperation with priority third countries is also clearly a key dimension to ensure a more effective action to prevent and reduce irregular migration, fully mirroring another of the points made in the Opinion. To address the root causes of migration, the European Agenda on Migration mainstreams migration in all the external policies of the EU including development, and humanitarian aid policies. To reduce the flow, we are convinced that those who are displaced by conflict and persecution have to find the most effective opportunity for protection in their region of origin.

The Commission agrees with the need to put in place a more coherent and comprehensive framework to prevent and reduce irregular migration and dismantle the criminal networks of migrant smugglers. This should include a systematic effort to capture and destroy vessels used by the smugglers, strengthened exchange of information and operational cooperation among EU Member States, EU agencies and other relevant players, as well as third countries of origin and transit. The need to strengthen the existing EU penal framework to migrant smuggling is being assessed and might result in a new legislative proposal. As announced in the European Agenda on Migration, the Commission adopted an action plan on smuggling.²

Strengthening Frontex's role and capacity is a key action identified in the European Agenda on Migration. The Commission notes the support expressed for the creation of a European System of Border Guards. As far as Eurosur is concerned, significant progress has been achieved in the last years, enhancing Eurosur's potential both with regard to detecting, preventing and combating irregular migration and to ensuring the protection and saving the lives of migrants. At the same time, further efforts are important, notably that the incident reports are uploaded without delay at the national level, this way enabling their immediate distribution to the other Eurosur National Coordination Centres. As far as reaction capability is concerned, it is important that the position of patrols in the national situational picture is shown in real time, as required by the Eurosur Regulation.

Finally, the European Agenda on Migration acknowledges that the relatively low rate of return of irregular migrants and of those whose asylum applications were rejected undermines the credibility of our efforts to reduce irregular migration. That is why the Agenda presents measures to reinforce the effectiveness of the EU system to return irregular migrants, in full respect of the standards and safeguards that ensure a dignified and humane

² COM(2015) 285 final.

return. An effective return policy is important to maintain public support for protecting persons in need.

The orientations that the Commission proposes in the European Agenda on Migration go in the same direction as the ones expressed by the Assemblée nationale in its resolution.

To achieve tangible results, the European Agenda on Migration shall be seen as a package - all the measures proposed have to be implemented in parallel – and we need to work together to make a common European migration policy a reality.

We therefore count on your support and look forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Dimitris Avramopoulos
Member of the Commission*