



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 20.11.2017
C(2017) 7534 final*

*Ms Regina BASTOS
Chairperson of the
European Affairs Committee
Palácio de S. Bento
P – 1249-068 LISBOA*

*cc Mr Eduardo FERRO RODRIGUES
President of the
Assembleia da República
Palácio de S. Bento
P – 1249-068 LISBOA*

Dear Chair,

The Commission would like to thank the Assembleia da República for its Opinion concerning the Second Progress Report: First Deliverables on the Partnership Framework with third countries {COM(2016) 960 final}.

Under the Framework Partnership launched by the Commission and endorsed by the Heads of State and Government during their meeting in June 2016, the European Union pursues a holistic approach on migration, developing comprehensive partnerships by fully embedding migration into the relations with main countries of origin and transit, addressing the root causes by promoting socio-economic development, fostering legal pathways and the respect for human rights of migrants, encouraging stronger cooperation of third countries on readmission, fighting migrant smuggling using also Common Security and Defence Policy operations and address trafficking in human beings. One year after the Partnership Framework was launched, the approach has shown tangible results. It has proven to be essential and at the centre of action to address the current migratory challenges faced by the Union and its Member States.

Following the adoption of the Second Progress Report examined by the Assembleia da República, the Commission has issued three more reports.¹ On 6 September 2017 the Fifth Progress Report on Partnership Framework was presented showing clearly that efforts are beginning to bear fruit.

There has been a considerable reduction – between 15 and 20% compared to last year – in the numbers of migrants crossing the Central Mediterranean, and most important a

¹ Third Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration, {COM(2017) 205 final}, 2.3.2017; Fourth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration, {COM(2017) 350 final} 13.6.2017; Fifth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration, {COM(2017) 471 final}, 6.9.2017.

significant reduction of deaths. These trends reflect the enhanced efforts carried out by the European Union over the last year and more recently jointly by Italy and the Union, in line with the Action Plan on measures to support Italy that was adopted on 4 July 2017².

Dialogue with partners in Africa and beyond is progressing steadily. There has been a sharp decrease in observed outgoing flows from Niger– from 333 891 in 2016 to 38 541 so far in 2017 - coupled with the major outcomes in assisted voluntary returns with some 4 000 voluntarily returned from Niger and more than 7 500 from Libya this year alone. Guinea is the first African country with which the European Union agreed on practical arrangements to facilitate readmission. Negotiations with other main countries of origin are ongoing. There has also been tangible progress in other regions, such as the successful outcome of the negotiations with Bangladesh on the Standard Operating Procedures for Return.

Obviously our efforts are for the moment focused on the Central Mediterranean where saving lives and the fight against smuggling remains a key priority that is being addressed in an integrated manner by the Union. Operation Sophia continues its anti-smuggling operations as well as the training and capacity building of the Libyan coastguard.

There are multiple Common Security and Defence Policy missions addressing this, from Mali to the Mediterranean, the cornerstone being the civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger, whose strengthening is a clear priority. The regionalisation of the Common Security and Defence Policy missions in Sahel and the support for the creation of a G5 joint force remain key priorities along with a stronger focus on Libya's southern borders. In parallel, European Union agencies such as Europol and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency have greatly strengthened their capacity to provide analytical and operational support to priority third countries in preventing irregular flows and disrupting the criminal networks.

At the same time, criminal networks involved in trafficking in human beings continue taking advantage of irregular migration routes. As an example, a sharp increase has been identified in the number of Nigerian women and girls trafficked to the European Union for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The need to address this heinous crime is systematically embedded in all relevant instruments adopted in the context of migration, and significant funding is allocated to anti-trafficking projects in the member states and third countries. It must be kept in mind though that human trafficking is not a migration related phenomenon per se: its forms and geographical scope go beyond the migration routes. Trafficking in human beings is a grave human rights violation fuelled by the demand for the services extracted from the victims and by huge financial profits. The European Union has developed a comprehensive legal and policy framework to address it. The Anti-trafficking Directive sets out minimum standards and, following the publication of the First Progress report, Users report and Transposition report in 2016,

² Action plan on measures to support Italy, reduce pressure along the Central Mediterranean route and increase solidarity, SEC(2017) 339, 4.7.2017

the Commission is monitoring the implementation of the Directive and may launch, if necessary, infringement procedures.

Even though efforts are for the moment focused on the Central Mediterranean, we do not lose sight of the interconnections among the different routes on which we remain vigilant. The implementation of the EU-Turkey statement remains a priority and keeps delivering concrete results in reducing irregular arrivals and fatalities and, equally importantly, in delivering practical support to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and through the resettlement of Syrians from Turkey to the European Union.

The Commission remains convinced that a holistic and tailor made approach where migration is fully embedded in the Union 's overall relations with third countries is the only way forward and is capable of bearing results if we remain committed and united.

It is clear that the European Union cannot do this alone. The continuous support of the Partnership Framework approach by all Union actors, Member-States and the European Parliament and national Parliaments alike, is vital for the sustainability of the process and its success.

At the same time, migration is a global phenomenon and it can only be addressed effectively and in all its dimensions by the international community as a whole, based on the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility. Along these lines, the Union needs to continue to engage at United Nations level, and be active in the development of the United Nations Compacts on Migration and Refugees. Indeed, reinforcing cooperation and partnership with the International Organisation for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has become a central element in our approach, notably in Libya and the countries along the Central Mediterranean Route where those arriving form mixed migration flows. In this regard, the Commission adopted on 27 September 2017 a Recommendation on enhancing legal pathways for persons in need of international protection which invites European Union Member States to resettle 50, 000 persons from priority regions, namely Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and countries along the Central Mediterranean route including Libya, Egypt, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Ethiopia. To support Member States' resettlement efforts under the targeted European Union schemes, the Commission will provide EUR 10,000 from the European Union budget for each person resettled.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Assembleia da República and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Federica Mogherini
Vice-President/High Representative*