



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 10.3.2017
C(2017) 1591 final*

*Mr Liviu DRAGNEA
President of the Camera Deputaților
Palace of the Parliament
Str. Izvor nr. 2-4, sector 5
RO – 050563 BUCHAREST*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Camera Deputaților for its Opinion on the Communication establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration {COM(2016) 385 final}.

This Communication proposes a broad package of measures designed to be an integral part of EU foreign policy. In proposing this new partnership framework, the Commission aims to show how the concerted efforts of the EU and its Member States can help achieve our common goals in relations with third countries as regards the management of migration.

The Commission welcomes the Camera Deputaților's broad support for the approach used as well as for intensifying cooperation with third countries, which is the cornerstone of the new Partnership Framework. The protection of the most vulnerable (i.e. children and women) in full respect of human rights is at the core of the Commission's action in each initiative it takes. Furthermore, the EU remains the largest development donor and humanitarian actor and is, despite criticism, leading by example. Although considerable actions have already been undertaken, no rapid solution to these issues can be expected. The Partnership Framework has an ambitious, innovative and comprehensive approach, fully embedding migration in our overall external relations. Its fundamental objectives are countering migrant smuggling, managing borders, and addressing the root causes of drivers for irregular migration. The Partnership Framework aims at building mutually beneficial partnerships and marks a new way of engaging with our partner countries.

The Commission has informed Member States about the progress achieved so far in two progress reports¹ which were also discussed at the European Councils of 20-21 October and 15-16 December 2016, and plans to do so by means of the third progress report in March 2017.²

¹ COM(2016) 700 final, COM(2016) 960 final.

² COM(2017) 205 final.

This new approach has already delivered a more coordinated, systematic and structured capacity to tap into the EU's collective influence and maximise the synergies and leverages of the Union's internal and external policies. The progress achieved so far with the current selection of countries, coordination framework and EU-wide approach must be capitalised on. As noted in the three progress reports, the Framework has created a new momentum in our dialogue with partner countries, allowing for a better understanding of EU priorities and a greater willingness to cooperate.

One of the short-term aims of this approach is to improve cooperation on return and readmission of third-country nationals without a right to stay in the EU. This external effort has to be matched by improvements in procedures and operations inside the EU. This could be achieved, for example, through tackling possible obstacles at national and EU level which could hamper swift return and readmission procedures, and dedicated capacity to identify and pursue migrant smuggling groups. Important building blocks for new cooperation on returns have been agreed; negotiations on readmission instruments have started with some of the priority countries identified in the Communication. In addition, to support Member States in improving their capacity to return, the Commission has established a one-stop-shop for data collection and operational coordination on returns at EU level (Integrated Return Management Application – IRMA).

The Commission welcomes the Camera Deputaţilor's support for the short-term actions proposed to improve readmission processes but also to fight smuggling and the management of irregular migration flows. The Commission will take into consideration the Camera Deputaţilor's views on a stronger focus needed to break up networks of people smugglers and traffickers. The Commission remains committed to paying equal attention to all aspects of irregular migration. As specified in the progress reports, concrete actions aimed at countering migrant smuggling and reducing the flow of irregular migrants have already been undertaken, with significant results achieved in Niger where the number of migrants crossing this dangerous route has fallen from over 70,000 in May 2016 to around 11 600 in November 2016. Direct EU support has been critical to make this happen.

The Commission welcomes the Camera Deputaţilor's remarks on efforts to better coordinate and harmonise assisted voluntary return programmes. In this regard the Commission would like to point, for instance, to the Voluntary Guidelines on the provision of assistance in the context of voluntary, and where considered necessary and appropriate, forced return which have recently been developed and endorsed by the Member States in the context of the European Migration Network / Return Expert Group.

The new mandate of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which was officially launched on 6 October 2016, presents further opportunities. The mandate has extended the Agency's support to Member States in the area of returns and allows for the provision of the necessary resources to implement hotspots. The Commission, together with the Agency, will continue to provide indirect assistance to encourage voluntary returns.

Under the revised European Neighbourhood Policy, partnership priorities and annexed compacts were discussed and negotiated with Lebanon and Jordan as renewed frameworks of political engagement and enhanced cooperation with the EU. Migration features prominently in these partnership priorities and compacts. Partnership priorities and the annexed compacts were formally adopted on 15 November 2016 for Lebanon, and on 20 December 2016 for Jordan. The objective is to strengthen the institutional and economic resilience of Lebanon and Jordan and to increase economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and host communities.

To support the new Partnership Framework and as announced in the Communication, the Commission proposed an External Investment Plan³ on 14 September 2016, which aims to address the root causes of irregular migration and to improve migration management in partner countries. The Commission will closely monitor the progress of the Plan and report annually to the European Parliament and the Council on its activities.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Camera Deputaților and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Dimitris Avramopoulos
Member of the Commission*

³ COM(2016) 581 final.