

FEDERICA MOGHERINI

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIMITRIS AVRAMOPOULOS

MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
MIGRATION, HOME AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP

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To the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs

Dear colleagues,

The tragic loss of life in the Mediterranean, the increasing migratory pressure towards Europe from Sub-Saharan Africa through Libya in the last weeks, and the exponential rise in asylum applications from the Western Balkans countries, require a strong political and operational response by the EU that joins together all available tools in the framework of a coherent strategy.

As you know, the European Commission has launched the process that will lead to the adoption of a European Agenda for Migration in May to be built around four main objectives: an effective asylum policy, a well-managed regular migration, the fight against irregular migration, and the protection of our common external borders.

In view of the next Foreign Affairs Council of 16 March, we would like to share some thoughts to guide our discussion on how we can contribute to the shape-up of the European Agenda for Migration, by stepping up our concrete action in the external dimension in order to avoid further tragedies at sea, secure protection of those in need and fight against criminal networks controlling trafficking and smuggling, in close cooperation with partners in the regions concerned by migratory flows, promoting respect for the human rights of migrants and refugees.

A stronger effort is needed to combine the EU's internal and external policies and increase cooperation with partner countries focusing on migration policy, as strongly underlined by the Council Conclusions (JHA) of October 2014 as well as during the joint FAC-JHA informal meeting in Rome on 27 November 2014. Similarly, the FAC (Development) on 12 December 2014 adopted conclusions on the need to address migration, recognising its significant development potential. We must find ways to improve the impact of EU actions in partner countries.

Against this background, we would like to present the following strands aiming at identifying concrete ideas and initiatives that could have immediate and tangible impact, which we suggest to further discuss on Monday:

- 1. We must intensify cooperation with countries of origin and transit of migratory flows along those routes that are currently most concerned, particularly in the framework of the regional processes, the Khartoum, Rabat and Budapest processes, as well as in bilateral relations with key partners.*

With regard to these cooperation frameworks covering the main migratory routes (the West African route, the East African route, the so-called Silk Route) we would propose to concentrate our action on the fight against smuggling and trafficking networks and the protection of migrants in distress.

We need to define pilot projects along these routes, engaging our partners in building local capacity for migration governance and conducting investigations and prosecution of criminal networks along migratory routes, focusing on border management, and supporting their efforts to respond effectively to complex migration flows, including through systems for information sharing about irregular migration developments. At the same time, pilot projects should also focus on assistance to stranded migrants, often undocumented and unable to complete their journey or to return to their country of origin. We need to engage and support our partners in providing relief and protection to migrants in need and opportunities for access to Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration in cooperation with international organisations such as the IOM.

We could explore with our partners options for assisted return schemes and opportunities for reintegration assistance projects in countries and local communities of origin.

An active role of EU delegations in a set of key third countries could be further explored, in this respect.

2. Asylum and protection must be a priority in our external action all along migratory routes. We need to step up efforts to secure protection to people fleeing conflict and crisis areas, both in countries of origin and in neighbouring countries where asylum seekers and refugees have settled.

We need to assess how existing EU instruments, in particular resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes and Regional Development and Protection Programmes, can be better used and coordinated in order to assist partner countries to become robust providers of effective protection in accordance with international law, as well as to provide safe alternatives to dangerous onward journeys and share protection responsibility with partners. This should be done in close cooperation with partner countries and with the assistance of relevant organisations such as the IOM and UNHCR. Initially, focus could be on countries like Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey that have made considerable efforts in reception and assistance.

We need to strengthen our support to partner countries hosting refugees, ensuring a coordinated approach to refugees and internally displaced persons across EU policies, including finding solutions to protracted displacement situations. In this context, it will be important to address protracted displacement not only as a humanitarian challenge, but also as a development, political and economic issue.

To this end, it will be essential to more systematically mainstream migration into the programming of development cooperation and into national and regional development strategies. All possibilities to allocate more financial means to tackle the root causes of irregular and forced migration, should be exploited.

Of course particular attention will continue to be paid to the situation in Syria and Libya and the related migratory and refugee flows as well as to North Africa, Turkey and to tackle situations of widespread abuse such as the Western Balkans.

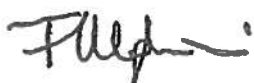
3. *While reinforcing cooperation with third countries in the fight against irregular migration, we need to reflect on how existing external action instruments can be used to enhance the potential of regular well-managed migration as a driver for human, economic, social and cultural development and growth, both for the EU and for countries of origin.*

We should reflect on measures aiming at enhancing qualified mobility with strategic partners. We should consider the role of Mobility Partnerships as an instrument for economic and social development, accompanied by a reflection on the role of remittances and on the mutual recognition of educational and professional qualifications as an added value both to sending and receiving societies. In this respect the coordinated work with diasporas in Member States and communities of origin can be explored in view of a renewed discussion with our partners on circular migration schemes.

We are convinced that our work on external action is a key component for a comprehensive approach to migration of the EU.

We look forward to your thoughts on these priorities in our first informal discussion on 16 March, with the aim of formulating more concrete proposals for deciding measures and actions at one of our next FAC meetings.

Yours sincerely,



Federica MOGHERINI



Dimitris AVRAMOPOULOS