



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos to the Committee on Federal and European Affairs of the Bavarian Parliament on 26 April

Munich, 26 April 2016

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the invitation to meet with you today to have a discussion on the latest developments in the area of migration as well as security. These are pressing global issues.

But as their impact is felt so acutely by our citizens, they are justifiably at the top of the political agenda at national, regional and local level.

We are all affected. I can be honest with you by saying that the first 18 months of my mandate have been challenging times, and I am pleased to be able to update you on our priorities, achievements and challenges ahead.

In our endeavour towards a European approach on both migration and security, our partnership and collaboration with the regional level, and with regional Parliaments such as yours, is of utmost importance.

Turning first to migration: the European Commission has underlined from the very beginning that the migration crisis demands a comprehensive, EU-wide approach.

Germany and Bavaria in particular has received a large share of refugees and migrants. You have dealt with this challenge in an exceptional way.

I myself and the Commission as a whole are well aware of the strains this has put on administrations in the *Länder* and communes. You set the right example for other Member States in how to deal with this crisis and I would like to thank you for this.

Before talking about the approach to the migration crisis, let me underline one thing: We need to strengthen and save Schengen. Temporary border controls are possible under certain conditions and Germany, like other Member States, has reintroduced them temporarily for obvious reasons.

However, border controls are no long term solution. And they cost us far too much as you know. Not just economically, but also – if not more – socially.

Internal free movement is one of our greatest achievements; it is the backbone what we are as a European Union.

Let me be clear: our ultimate purpose is lifting all internal border controls no later than the end of the year – even if this may require in the meantime that we allow the extension of temporary border controls at specific points within the EU.

I have presented on 4 March a "Back to Schengen" Roadmap and I hope that Germany will participate in the measures aimed at restoring the proper functioning of the Schengen area as soon as possible.

Of course, an internal area without borders implies that we are successful at reinforcing our external borders. That is why we need to regain control of our external borders and ensure that they are managed better.

As you know, we have been very active to achieve this goal. We proposed a European Border and Coast Guard, which will be crucial in this respect. It will help to re-establish the conditions for lifting internal border controls but also to manage migration more effectively and to prevent security threats.

A genuine European solution to the problems we are facing. Just a few weeks ago I also proposed an Entry-Exit system, to control third-country nationals coming to the Schengen area for short-term stays. To make our borders smarter and stronger, and to facilitate crossings for bona fide travellers.

As regards the migration crisis, my colleague Mr Timmermans was with Chancellor Merkel and President Tusk in Turkey this weekend. The EU is committed to fully implementing all elements of the EU-Turkey agreement.

Cooperation with Turkey is crucial in dealing with the crisis. Turkey must also be helped to deal with the high number of refugees and migrants in its own territory, most of them fleeing from a war zone.

Both the EU and Turkey need each other, as equal partners. This is a balanced partnership, one where we aim for each side to deliver on its commitments, but without renouncing our principles or conditions.

The agreement reached at the EU-Turkey Summit of 18 March 2016 aimed to break the people smugglers' business model, and we have seen the first results on this already.

The agreement also aimed to remove the incentive to seek irregular routes to the EU, obviously in full accordance with EU and international law.

A significant drop in the number of arrivals in the Greek islands has already been registered, currently under 200 per day. The Commission is working intensively to support Greece and Turkey in implementing the foreseen actions.

It requires huge operational efforts from all involved, and most of all from Greece.

I welcome therefore that the new emergency assistance instrument to cater for an urgent humanitarian response within the EU has been agreed quickly. The efforts already undertaken have allowed us to start implementing the 1-for-1 agreement.

The first returns to Turkey of persons who did not apply for asylum and resettlement of Syrians from Turkey to some EU Member States, including Germany (37 persons), took place on 4 April.

Germany has also so far received 42 persons resettled from Turkey.

I wish to thank Germany for this important confidence-building step, and for being, once again, an example to other European countries.

It is now important to keep the pace up to deliver on all elements. For example, the first projects under the Turkey Facility have started. By the end of July we should aim for €1 billion of projects committed for ensuring a better future for Syrians in Turkey.

At the same time, Turkey is working hard to fulfil all conditions to obtain visa liberalisation. The EU is helping Turkey to deliver on all outstanding issues – but let me be clear: we are not watering down our benchmarks.

In order to obtain visa liberalisation, the conditions must be fulfilled.

As I said, less migrants arrived in the last days in Greece. But we need to continue to support Greece. Around 53,000 asylum seekers and migrants are stranded there; 11,000 in Idomeni alone.

I have visited Idomeni and I was very touched by the situation there. Let me underline that about 65-70% of those present there would be eligible for relocation.

Relocation must remain a priority to alleviate the pressure on Greece. I have also explicitly raised this at the Justice and Home Affairs Council last week.

While Germany has been consistently supportive of this approach, other Member States have been less so and we are working hard to change this.

I also count on your support to pass the message to your fellow parliamentarians in other Member States that this is the best way forward.

We need to put an end to migrant smuggling networks by removing the demand for their services. Smugglers have no remorse and need to be cut off from their business base.

And mostly: we need to prevent further tragedies. We also need to prevent any deterioration of the situation in Italy where migration flows are fluctuating but overall increasing. In the last 4 weeks, almost 11,000 migrants have arrived in Italy.

Better weather conditions might imply a further increase. Let me underline in this context, that we have so far no indication that the EU-Turkey agreement led to a change of migration routes.

In Italy, four hotspots are now operational. A fifth one is urgently needed as well as mobile hotspots teams. Member States need to step up the deployment of experts, in order to respond to the expected higher seasonal arrivals in Italy.

I welcome the German offer already made in sending experts but the situation needs to be stabilised in a sustainable way. Greece and Italy have stepped up efforts to ensure systematic security checks in hotspots.

In the hotspots, terminals are now technically available to allow fingerprinting checks against the Schengen Information System, Interpol and Europol databases. They are also checked against the national police database of third country nationals and the database of national arrest warrants.

EUROPOL has also deployed staff to support the security checks. Let me assure you that the Commission is very closely following the situation in both countries and the development of different

routes.

Tomorrow I will be going to Catania, to visit the EU Regional Taskforce there. In the meantime, as you know, PM Renzi has written to President Juncker about his ideas to strengthen the external dimension of our migration policy – and these are fully aligned with our approach.

Stepping up cooperation with third countries is also essential to ensure that our return policy functions well.

First, all Member States need to step up their efforts to implement in an effective way the Return directive in all its aspects.

In particular, return decisions should be promptly issued to those who do not have the right to stay in the territory of an EU Member State.

I am pleased to see that German return rates have doubled this year compared to last year – this is an important improvement!

We need to improve our cooperation on readmission with third countries by increasing our levers and incentives collectively. It is not acceptable that countries of origin do not accept their own nationals.

I was in Pakistan recently, and the Commission is having an important meeting on this issue with Afghanistan in the next weeks.

We have invested a lot with our partners over the past months. We need the support of Member States in third countries to speak with one voice to the local authorities.

On Morocco, Germany has been making important progress, and I hope we can extrapolate this to the EU level.

In parallel, when it comes to the operational side, Frontex capacities to organise and fund joint return operations have been stepped up recently and the proposal for a European border and coast guard will further enhance the role of the agency in the field of return.

Let me now turn to integration, because we also need to look beyond immediate emergency. I am glad that Germany and the Commission are on the same page here: we understand that the next big challenge is integration.

Europe needs to invest in integration if we want our efforts to manage the migration crisis to succeed. Germany has invested significantly in this important field.

Integration is national competence. But action at EU level will allow exchanging best practices. The Commission is preparing an Action Plan on Integration [to be issued beginning of June], which will lay out all the measures that the EU intends to take, including funding, to support Member States' integration efforts and policies.

The Action Plan will target all third country nationals but also focus on the integration of refugees, across all policy areas and throughout different phases of the integration process.

In order to be able to deliver on all these elements, the Commission significantly supports Member States financially.

In 2015-2016, €10 billion has already been mobilised at the EU level to strengthen the necessary actions in response to the migration and refugee crisis. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund have been topped-up with extra money in the EU budget for 2015 and 2016.

Tailored enhanced contribution from the European Investment and Structural Funds (ESIF) in particular should be considered. For Germany, the total AMIF allocation amounts now to €402.6 million.

Five projects are currently being implemented by beneficiaries based in Bavaria, supporting efforts on return and also integration measures. In total, 20 projects from Bavaria have been selected for funding under the first Call for Proposals by the Responsible Authority, the Federal Office for migration and refugees.

Let me now turn to the security dimension: We are taking all these actions on the migration front, while coordinating Europe's response to another burning issue – security.

I know that you were also confronted here in Munich with some threats that lead to the evacuation of railway stations. The recent attacks in Europe underlined the reality of the threats – but also our vulnerabilities.

We are united in the face of terror – at all levels of governance in Europe. But we have to show our unity with concrete action.

And that is where we are still falling short.

As you know, we have a European Agenda on Security since April last year. We have put words to action in the course of this year.

Tomorrow the EU PNR (Passenger Name Record) gets signed into law.

We proposed an EU directive to criminalise terrorism, with harmonised terrorist offenses.

We proposed stronger EU rules to control legal firearms and an action plan to control the illegal market.

We launched the European Counter-Terrorism Centre at Europol, and we reinforced it to make it the epicentre of our operations.

But we still have a lot of work to do. We are still far from the ideal situation. And the main reason is fragmentation in the way we work against terrorism.

Member States are of course responsible for ensuring the security of their citizens – that is clear and beyond any doubt. But it is equally clear that the threats Europe faces today go beyond national security.

When foreign terrorist fighters – very often EU citizens – can move from one Member State to another and in and out of our external borders to plan their terrorist acts, it is clear that our problem is transnational.

The internal security of one Member State is the internal security of the whole Union.

Our vulnerabilities are shared. It is fragmentation that makes us vulnerable. Fragmentation in legal instruments, in operational methods and in mind-sets, prevents us from dealing with terrorism effectively.

We cannot deal with terrorism in national silos. We have to connect all the dots and work towards a genuine and effective Security Union, based on the systematic sharing of information.

We announced our approach for this Security Union last Wednesday. A lot has been done already; more is possible.

This approach is based precisely on improving our management and sharing of information.

To paraphrase an old saying – information is security.

We will respond to the terrorist threat effectively when we make our information systems interconnected, interoperable, and searchable.

We must remember an element of political context: while we are working on these issues, we are witnessing the worrying rise in left and right wing violent extremism.

I am deeply concerned how in the aftermath of recent atrocities, we have seen a backlash against those communities who are wrongly perceived as being responsible. We must be aware of the increased risk of polarisation in our societies and tackle the phenomenon of radicalisation in our societies.

Again here, there is a strong point to be made about how we cooperate, the trust between us and our sharing of key information.

The challenge of radicalisation requires a comprehensive approach, focusing both on prevention but also on security. Member States need to consistently monitor all radicalised individuals and share the intelligence on the risks with other Member States and EU agencies.

At the same time, we must deepen our approach involving different policy areas such as the internet, education, the prison system, social inclusion and integration. That is why we attach great importance to empowering practitioners to address counter radicalisation at a local level, through the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN).

We need to make Information Systems for border and security smarter and interoperable, and increase its use by Member States.

What we are in favour of is creating a Single Search Interface, where all data is searchable with just once click.

As I said at the beginning, the building block of a common security policy is sharing more trust and more information.

We all know that there is no quick fix to the migration and terrorism situations, and we should not pretend to the public that easy solutions can be found.

That is why the Commission has always, from the beginning, followed a comprehensive approach.

Parliamentarians also have a strong responsibility in this respect and I welcome the support of the German Parliamentarians in the Bundestag and *Länderparlamente* for a long term sustainable European solution.

The Commission will continue to devote all possible resources, political, structural and financial, to ensure a coherent and comprehensive response to the migration crisis, in all its priority policy areas.

From fighting root causes of irregular migration, securing our external borders, dealing with the refugee crisis in the EU and our neighbouring countries to integrating refugees as well as to dealing with security threats and terrorism.

These are all challenges that go beyond borders. All is interconnected and we need to work on this in a coordinated way.

Member States need to move forward and understand that national measures will not provide solutions for any single Member State and definitely not for the European Union as a whole.

And we should not put our European values at risk which have led to the success of the EU and its attractiveness.

I am grateful that there is support in this house for a comprehensive approach.

SPEECH/16/1588

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