

Draft

Malta Declaration by the Members of the European Council

on the external aspects of migration: addressing the Central Mediterranean route

1. We welcome and support the Maltese Presidency's efforts to take forward all elements of the EU's comprehensive migration policy. A key element of a sustainable migration policy is to ensure effective control of our external border and significantly reduce illegal flows into the EU. In 2016, arrivals decreased to one-third of the levels in 2015. On the Eastern Mediterranean route, arrivals in the last four months of 2016 were down 98% year-on-year. On the Central Mediterranean route, however, over 181,000 arrivals were detected in 2016, while the number of persons dead or missing at sea has reached a new record every year since 2013. With hundreds having already lost their lives in 2017 and spring approaching, we are determined to take additional action to stem migratory flows along the Central Mediterranean route and break the business model of smugglers, while remaining vigilant about other routes. We will step up our work with Libya as the main country of departure as well as with its North African and sub-Saharan neighbours. Our actions will be carried out in full respect for human rights and international law, and in conjunction with UNHCR and IOM.
2. The Partnership Framework and the Valletta Action Plan have allowed us to initiate long-term cooperation with a number of partner countries. This work is already yielding results and will be intensified. At the same time, the urgency of the situation requires immediate additional operational measures at the regional level, taking a pragmatic and flexible approach at each and every point along the migratory route. In this context, we welcome the joint Commission and High Representative Communication "Migration on the Central Mediterranean Route - Managing flows, saving lives".
3. In Libya, capacity building is key for the authorities to acquire control over the land and sea borders and to combat transit and smuggling activities. Efforts to stabilise Libya are now more important than ever. The EU remains committed to the full empowerment of the Government of National Accord, as part of an inclusive government supported by the United Nations. The EU will also step up cooperation with and assistance to Libyan regional and local communities and with international organisations active in the country.

4. Priority will be given to the following elements:

- a) training, equipment and support to the Libyan national coast guard. Complementary EU training programmes must be rapidly stepped up, both in intensity and numbers, starting with those already undertaken by Operation SOPHIA and building on its experience. Funding and planning for these activities needs to be made sustainable and predictable, including through the Seahorse Mediterranean Network;
- b) further efforts to disrupt the business model of smugglers through enhanced operational action, within an integrated approach involving Libya and relevant international partners, engaged Member States, CSDP missions and operations, Europol and the EBCG;
- c) supporting through all available instruments the development of local communities in Libya, especially in coastal areas and at the Libyan borders, to improve their socio-economic situation and enhance their resilience as host communities;
- d) seeking to ensure adequate reception capacities and conditions in Libya for migrants, together with the UNHCR and IOM;
- e) supporting IOM in significantly stepping up assisted voluntary return activities;
- f) enhancing information campaigns and outreach addressed at migrants, in cooperation with local actors and international organisations, particularly to counter the smugglers' business model;
- g) helping to reduce the pressure on Libya's land borders, working both with the Libyan authorities and all neighbours of Libya, including by supporting projects gradually enhancing the Libyan border management capacity;
- h) keeping track of alternative routes and possible diversion of smugglers' activities, through cooperative efforts with Libya's neighbours and the countries under the Partnership Framework, with the support of Member States and all relevant EU agencies and by making use of all surveillance instruments available;
- i) continuing support to existing efforts and initiatives from individual Member States directly engaged with Libya;
- j) deepening dialogue and cooperation on migration management with countries neighbouring Libya, such as Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria, including better operational cooperation with Member States and the EBCG on returns.

5. These objectives shall be underpinned by the necessary resources. Some of the actions can be funded within projects already under way, drawing on such instruments as the EU-Trust

Fund for Africa, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, support to IOM and UNHCR etc. To cover further funding needs we welcome the Commission's intention to mobilise as a first step an additional 200 million euro for the implementation of these actions.

6. We will further develop our external migration policy and make it resilient for future crises. We will therefore identify potential barriers, for example in relation to conditions to be met for returns, while respecting international law. We welcome the Commission's intention to rapidly present an updated Action Plan on Returns and to provide guidance for more operational returns by Member States and effective readmission using the flexibility available in the existing acquis. We will also continue to address this issue during the negotiations on the proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System.

7. We agree to act determinedly and speedily to achieve the objectives set out in this Declaration and call upon all actors to work towards this end. We welcome the intention of the Maltese Presidency to present a detailed roadmap to this effect to the Council at the earliest opportunity, to take work forward in close cooperation with the Commission and the High Representative, and to ensure close monitoring of results. The European Council will review progress on the overall approach at its meeting in June on the basis of a report from the Maltese Presidency.