

Informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs ministers

Press statement following discussions on Central Mediterranean

6 July 2017 | Tallinn, Estonia

On Thursday 6 July 2017, EU's Interior Ministers, under the chairmanship of the Estonian Minister of Interior, Andres Anvelt, and in the presence of the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Schengen Associated Countries, addressed the migration situation in the Central Mediterranean.

Last week, on 30 June, the Italian Minister of Interior addressed a letter to the President of the Council of Ministers, the Estonian Minister of Interior and to the Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, alerting that the situation in Italy would soon no longer be sustainable. On 2 July, the Ministers of Interior of France, Germany and Italy met together with the Commissioner in Paris to discuss the proposals put forward by Italy.

In Tallinn, the Ministers of Interior acknowledged that the situation in the Central Mediterranean and the resulting pressure on Italy is of great concern to all Member States. In line with the European Council conclusions of 22-23 June, the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to take urgent action by stepping up coordination and delivery of all the elements contained in the Malta Declaration, the Partnership Framework and the Joint Valletta Action Plan, as well as the need to continue steps towards finding the right balance between the principles of solidarity and responsibility and to provide adequate support to the most affected Member States.

The Ministers of Interior welcomed and based their discussions on the Action Plan presented by the Commission on 4 July 2017, containing immediate measures that can be taken by the Commission, the High Representative, Italy and other Member States.

The Ministers of Interior reached a common understanding on using all available tools of the comprehensive migration policy and more specifically on the need to accelerate the collective work in implementing the following priority actions with the aim to reduce the migratory pressure along the Central Mediterranean route and to step up support to Italy:

- **Increase engagement with Libya and other key third countries**, notably by: continuing to enhance the capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard; reinforcing the Assisted Voluntary Returns from Libya and Niger to countries of origin; agreeing for stepping up resettlement from regions of conflict; further engaging with Niger and Mali to prevent movements of irregular migrants towards Libya and notably significantly strengthening border controls at the external borders of Libya (particularly the Southern ones); providing adequate funding for the EU Trust Fund North Africa Window for which sustainability for 2018 and beyond



should be ensured through significant additional contributions, including from the Member States.

- **Review and better coordinate the maritime operations to save lives at sea and fight smugglers.** Ministers welcomed the initiative of the Italian authorities to ensure that the NGO vessels involved in Search and Rescue (SAR) activities operate within a set of clear rules to be adhered to, in the form of a code of conduct to be urgently finalised by the Italian authorities. This must be done in cooperation with the Commission and in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the NGOs themselves. In addition, it is important to: improve the cooperation between the Italian Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centre (MRCC) and neighbouring MRCCs where established or other types of operational cooperation to ensure timely and effective intervention, including disembarkation; continue to encourage the North Africa partners, notably Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to formally notify their SAR areas and establish MRCCs.
- Achieve **tangible results regarding the returns of irregular migrants.** It is urgent to accelerate the work to put in place well-functioning EU readmission agreements and practical arrangements with third countries, using all possible levers and incentives, including visa policy. The new capacities of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, notably in the field of return, need to be fully mobilized, with support from Member States. It is crucial to continue removing all obstacles to implementing swift and effective returns bearing in mind the Commission's Recommendation of March 2017.
- **Ministers of Interior also affirmed their full support to Italy** in implementing an effective migration policy, reducing pull factors, securing 100% identification, registration and fingerprinting of all migrants, guaranteeing quick identification of those in need of protection and rapid returns of those who do not apply or are not granted international protection. Ministers welcomed the commitment reaffirmed by the Italian Minister of Interior to fully implement the current asylum acquis and return policies. Ministers committed also to take all steps needed to guarantee that all those eligible from Italy are relocated.
- As part of a comprehensive approach to the management of migration challenges where the focus should in parallel be on sustainably reducing the irregular flows of arrivals, the Ministers stressed the need to **continue the work with utmost priority on the legislative proposals under the reform of the Common European Asylum System**, based on the principles of solidarity and responsibility, with the view of ensuring holistic migration policy and sustainable long-term solutions.





The Ministers of Interior took note of the preparations for the Ministerial conference on the Central Mediterranean route to be held in Tunis on 24 July 2017 as a key occasion to further step up engagement with our North Africa partners. Ministers also took note of the meeting called next week by the European Border and Coastguard Agency to discuss operation Triton.

