



## State of the Union 2018: Remarks of Commissioner Avramopoulos on new measures for stronger EU borders and solidarity on migration

Brussels, 13 September 2018

Dear all,

Yesterday, President Juncker spoke of the need to share sovereignty when and where needed, in order to make each of our nation states stronger.

Today, I am glad to present to you in more detail how we plan to do that in the area of migration and border management. Our proposals, our initiatives, and our support are about offering more Europe where more Europe is needed.

Everyone in Europe agrees that stronger and better protected external borders are needed, that returns of those who have no right to stay should be improved, and that those who arrive on our shores should be immediately and effectively identified but also processed.

But it is only a stronger and united European Union that can truly and effectively deliver on this – not single Member States on their own. That does not mean that the European Union should replace or take over the competences and responsibilities of Member States.

As President Juncker said, European sovereignty is born of Member States' national sovereignty and does not replace it. On the contrary: we want all Member States to take up their responsibilities, and we want to better support them in doing so. Only collective and concrete EU actions can and will make a difference on the ground. The last three years are already proof of that, and we want to go even further. This is why we are proposing to give a significantly stronger mandate to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency with increased resources and powers that will enable it to provide constant and reliable support to Member States in protecting the EU's external borders, wherever and whenever needed.

We expect this to be an even bigger game changer in the way in which our common external borders will be managed and protected. What we are proposing will give the Agency the right level of ambition to better protect the EU's external borders, manage migration effectively and ensure a high level of security within the Union. I will come back to the issue of security later. We will establish a standing corps of 10,000 operational EU staff by 2020. Member States will also have to contribute to the standing corps with long and short term secondments.

All members of this new operational arm will be able to carry out tasks requiring executive powers and give their support to Member States wherever they need it, whether:

- patrolling borders;
- authorising or refusing entry at the external borders;
- or intercepting persons who have crossed the border irregularly.

They will always act under the authority and control of the host Member State where the operation takes place. This is not about infringing on Member States' sovereignty – but about reinforcing it. Between 2021 and 2027, the Agency's budget will be beefed up to a total of almost €11.3 billion.

With this increased budget, the Agency will be in a position to acquire its own equipment such as vessels, planes and vehicles, gradually decreasing its dependence on assets pooled by Member States. Like this, we will not have to face situations anymore where the efficiency of our operations is jeopardised because of gaps in equipment or resources when Member States are not responding quickly enough or sometimes not even contributing at all.

As the past years have clearly shown, strong EU borders also require cooperation with and support to countries in our neighbourhood and beyond. This is why the Agency will now be able to launch joint operations and deploy staff in all priority third countries, no longer limited only to those neighbouring the EU, and always subject to prior agreement between the Union and the countries concerned.

As President Juncker said yesterday, we are not proposing a militarisation of our Union, and we will never be a fortress. We want to be more efficient at managing our borders, whilst upholding and defending our values of openness and tolerance, because Europe will continue to offer safety to those

in need of protection.

This is also why we are proposing to reinforce the European Union Agency for Asylum, so it can at all times provide a rapid and full service to Member States to manage asylum procedures better and faster. This includes technical and operational support – underpinned by an increased budget of €1.25 billion for the period 2021-2027.

The reinforced Asylum Agency will work hand in hand with the European Border and Coast Guard. Together they will now be able to deploy migration management support teams at all times when needed, including in hotspots and any future controlled centres. These teams will be able to receive arrivals, quickly distinguish between persons who are in need of protection and those who are not, and carry out asylum and return procedures. Both agencies will operate in full respect of Member States' competences and sovereignty. All final decisions will remain in Member States' hands. Both Agencies will also work in complementarity when it comes to return, to ensure a more effective interaction between asylum and return procedures.

We have all said many times that Europe needs to have a more effective return policy. We are therefore also proposing a targeted review of the Return Directive to speed up return procedures, better prevent absconding, abuses and irregular secondary movements and increase effective returns. An important element of our reform is a new border procedure through which individuals with rejected asylum applications to be channelled directly towards a simplified return procedure. This will ensure that return decisions can be taken quickly and fully enforced at the border.

We also propose clearer rules on detention with a new initial minimum period of at least 3 months, so that Member States can complete return procedures in cases where there is a risk of absconding or where migrants do not cooperate. All these elements will continue to apply in full respect of fundamental rights and non-refoulement, and the Member States' competence on the final return decision.

Finally, if we want to be both honest and realistic about comprehensive migration management, then we also need to talk and do more about legal pathways. Unfortunately, this is often either dismissed as being the least important aspect or otherwise labelled as the most controversial one. But it should be neither, because enhancing legal pathways is essential to both reducing irregular and unsafe migration, as well as to creating a more controlled and proactive legal labour migration, based on the needs of our economies.

With this in mind we call on Member States to step up their efforts to:

- fully turn their 50,000 resettlement pledges into reality as soon as possible and to agree on our proposed Union resettlement framework;
- to urgently deliver on the ambitious reform of the new EU Blue card scheme proposed by us already in 2016 to attract highly skilled workers to the EU in order to improve the competitiveness of the EU economy; and
- strengthen cooperation with key African countries by developing and launching pilot projects by the end this year.

Finally, before closing, I also want to say a few words about security. Security is about our borders, as I said earlier when talking about the European Border and Coast Guard. It is equally about denying terrorists the space and means to attack us. But it is first and foremost about ideas. About what drives individuals to take up arms against the societies that raised them. This is why we propose new rules to get terrorist content off the web within one hour – my colleagues Mariya, Vera and Julian will give you more details later.

Dear all,

We have come a long way from the security and migration crises that hit Europe in 2015. We managed gradually to create a comprehensive and sustainable policy that ensures that migration is well managed and controlled.

We are also taking steady steps towards a genuine and effective Security Union. Those who are calling for new solutions or criticising that there are no solutions, should take a closer look at everything we have put on the table. I have heard no other viable solutions or alternatives to what we have proposed.

Those that wish to tell their citizens that the challenge of migration will disappear if you erect walls or take isolated, non-European actions are not only wrong, they are also not being honest with their citizens. It is only as a stronger and more united Union that we can address all these different challenges together.

What I have presented to you today are the final pieces of the migration puzzle, which I hope will feed

the discussions of the leaders in Salzburg and ultimately facilitate an overall compromise on the ongoing reform of the EU's asylum system. We are ready, as we have done during the last three years, to support Member States in every way, but they also have to accept it and assume it.

Thank you.

SPEECH/18/5765

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