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LIMITE

ASIM 78

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NOTE

from : the Presidency

to : K4 Committee

Subject : Influx of migrants from Iraq and the neighbouring region: report of the meetings held in Istanbul and Ankara on 9 and 10 March 1998

In accordance with the remit from Coreper on 5 March, the Presidency, accompanied by the Chairman of the Migration Working Group and representatives of the Commission and General Secretariat, visited Istanbul and Ankara on 9 and 10 March 1998. A report of those meetings is made available for the information of Member States and as a basis for further work on, in particular, Action Point 2 and Section G of the Action Plan on the influx of migrants from Iraq and the neighbouring region (ref: 5573/98 ASIM 13).

Summary

2. In Istanbul, officers of the security and of the aliens police described the use of Istanbul as a transit point for illegal immigration to the EU by nationals of, in particular, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt and sought EU assistance in effecting the readmission of third country nationals illegally present in Turkey to their country of origin and for continuing contact and co-operation at official level.

3. In Ankara, MFA and Interior representatives confirmed their willingness to co-operate at a technical level and expressed interest in increased information exchange and technical assistance in tackling illegal immigration. They were conscious of the need to address the involvement of organised crime in the trafficking of illegal migrants. As regards asylum issues, the Turkish authorities mentioned their plans to establish reception centres for illegal migrants, **DELETED**

4. In light of these contacts, further cooperation between the EU and Turkey could be useful in the following areas: the development of proper procedures for screening of asylum seekers, including technical and

training assistance for border guards; the establishment of centres for detaining illegal immigrants prior to removal; the exchange of practical experience on effecting returns to **DELETED** (provision of travel documents etc); assistance in developing new Turkish laws to address the problem of illegal immigration; and technical assistance in improving the detection of false documents at the border. The Presidency will take these proposals forward in the relevant working groups.

Detail

5. A meeting was arranged on 9 March in Istanbul with **DELETED** Deputy Head of the Security Police in Istanbul and **DELETED** Head of the foreigner's branch office in the Istanbul Police Department. They described the nature and scale of illegal immigration in Istanbul and confirmed their operational focus on illegal immigration by sea. They were aware also of illegal immigration by land from the neighbouring region, together with the incidence of legal arrivals in Turkey by third country nationals who subsequently remained irregularly, most obviously by means of the destruction of travel documents. Nationalities receiving particular mention were Iraqis, Iranians, Egyptians, other Africans (unspecified), Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. **DELETED**

6. The Istanbul authorities were conscious of the need to address the organised trafficking element of this trade and described their recent activity; the figure of 16,000 removals in 1997 was quoted. In carrying forward their work, they identified the need for co-operation/assistance in the following areas:

- i. improved procedures for the readmission of third country nationals to Bangladesh and Pakistan. Arrangements for return took up to five months;
- ii. enhanced co-operation and support from UNHCR to assist in the return of failed asylum seekers; and
- iii. continued contact at operational level, through institutions such as Interpol and direct between police services.

7. On 10 March in Ankara, the Presidency met senior officials from the MFA and the Ministry of the Interior, **DELETED** Director General for Consular, Legal and Property Affairs. **DELETED** confirmed the situation as earlier reported but in particular emphasised the pressure which Turkey felt as a transit point, given the attraction of the EU to illegal third country national immigrants seeking asylum for economic reasons.

8. Turkey considered that action further to strengthen its visa regime would not assist in stemming the flow of illegal immigration since most illegal migrants arrived irregularly across the land frontiers. They did however repeat the point, earlier made in Istanbul, about their difficulties in returning third country nationals to **DELETED**. (Returns to neighbouring third countries were not problematic.) To tackle this problem, they said that they were taking forward, with the co-operation of Italy, a project for the creation of reception houses where illegal immigrants could be held pending their removal. The Presidency and Commission indicated that this could be a project where the EU expertise and funding might be of benefit; Turkey said that they were open to offers of assistance. On timing, they had no firm plans, given the funding difficulties.

9. **DELETED**

10. To complement this reception housing, Turkey wanted to ensure speedier return of third country nationals, reducing time in retention to a maximum ten days. They were not interested in taking the initiative in developing formal readmission agreements with the third countries concerned (which they said would be contrary to their law), but would be interested in the exchange of practical experience with those Member States who achieved speedy removals and redocumentation and would be content for the EU to explore readmission agreements with **DELETED**

11. Turkish plans to amend their immigration laws, addressing in particular the problem of illegal immigration, was under way. They would welcome an exchange of views with the EU on the definitions to be used for the various categories.

12. On the Action Points on border controls, Turkey would welcome EU expertise on the detection of false documents and assistance in the provision of optical document readers.

13. Finally, Turkey requested better feedback from Member States on any illegal immigration via Turkey, in order to enable them in turn to improve their activity against illegal immigration, particularly where traffickers were involved and where greater cooperation could enable Turkey to take action against the organised criminal element.

14. In response to a suggestion from the Presidency, the Turkish delegation indicated that they were in

principle favourable towards the idea of a dialogue between Turkey and K4 Committee. May/June might be possible timing for such a meeting and Turkey would be content with a Troika group from the EU side. They would consult their EU Department urgently and provide a considered response, together with any proposals for the agenda for such discussions.

Conclusion

15. The Presidency recommends, in the light of this visit, that action can be taken in the following areas to implement the remit in the Action Plan in relation to Turkey and to seek to improve Turkish procedures on illegal immigration:

- i. examine means of support for Turkish proposals to establish reception houses for illegal immigrants including the possibility of Community funding;
- ii. exchange of experience on removals **DELETED** including a possible approach to these countries on Turkey's behalf;
- iii. exchange of experiences on formulation of laws on illegal immigration;
- iv. examine scope for exchange of expertise on the detection of false documents, including possible technical assistance;
- v. ensure feedback to Turkey on operational information involving illegal immigration, in particular where trafficking is involved;
- vi. liaise with UNHCR to provide training to Turkish border police on screening of asylum seekers.

16. The Presidency suggests that it could be appropriate to nominate a 'lead' Member State in relation to each action point. This could help to ensure coordination between EU activity and ongoing work in other fora, for example, the work of the Schengen Task Force, under the chairmanship of the Belgian Schengen Presidency, and existing cooperation between Italy and Turkey on the establishment of reception centres. The K4 Committee is invited to discuss this proposal and, if appropriate, reach agreement on the 'lead' Member State

in relation to each Action Point.

17. Pending a reply from the Turkish authorities about the proposal for a meeting at K4 level with Turkey, the K4 Committee is invited to consider:

- i. the format and timing of such a meeting; and
 - ii. possible items for an agenda (of which this is one but not necessarily the sole issue on which a dialogue with Turkey would be useful).
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