

Beat: Politics

European Commission makes progress on Agenda on Migration

EC President Juncker met Ban Ki-Moon

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USPA NEWS - Two weeks after presenting the European Agenda on Migration, the Commission is adopting the first proposals of its comprehensive approach to improving the management of migration. Following the terrible loss of life in the Mediterranean last month, European leaders made a commitment to solidarity.

With the proposals, the Commission is turning words into action and setting out immediate and long-term responses to the migration challenges that Europe faces. First Vice-President Frans Timmermans said that "today the Commission is matching words with action. Solidarity goes hand in hand with responsibility. This is why our proposals include the strong requirement that asylum rules are properly applied, and that Member States do everything they should to prevent abuse. Everyone who needs sanctuary should find it in Europe. But those who have no justified claim should be quickly identified and returned to their home country. This is essential for migration policies to be well accepted in society."

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini said that "two weeks after adopting our Agenda, we present [Wednesday] concrete proposals for its implementation, with one main aim: quickly save lives and provide protection in the EU for people in need, be they at sea, in the EU or in third countries. For this reason, we are intensifying our cooperation with countries of origin and transit and with countries hosting refugees, not only to support asylum and migration capacities, but also to tackle the root causes that force people to escape and migrate: poverty, wars, persecutions, violations of human rights and natural disasters."

"I have discussed these objectives yesterday with Ministers of Development, in the context of our reflection on new sustainable Development Goals, and I have exchanged views once more with the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on the comprehensive steps we want to take," Mogherini added. Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos said that "today, the Commission has shown that it can act quickly and resolutely to better manage migration. The relocation and resettlement schemes, together with the strengthening of Triton and Poseidon and the Action Plan to fight smugglers, respond to the most urgent challenges we are confronted with."

"At the same time, we are launching the public consultation on the revision of the Blue Card Directive, a consultation that we hope will bring us valuable input for turning this instrument into a true business card for the Union in the global competition for talents and skills," he said. The European Commission is presenting several different and concrete measures to respond to the current migration challenges, including relocation, an emergency response mechanism to assist Italy and Greece: the European Commission is proposing to use the emergency response mechanism under Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

This provision, which is being activated for the first time, will be used to set up an emergency relocation scheme to assist Italy and Greece. This scheme will apply to Syrian and Eritrean nationals in need of international protection that arrived in either Italy or Greece after 15 April 2015 or that arrive after the mechanism is launched, EC explained in a press release.

A total of 40,000 persons should be relocated from Italy and Greece to other EU Member States based on a distribution key over the next 2 years, corresponding to approximately 40% of the total number of asylum seekers in clear need of international protection who entered these countries in 2014. The Commission is ready to do the same if other Member States "such as Malta" also face a sudden influx of migrants. Member States will receive 6,000 Euro for each person relocated on their territory.

Second measure is resettlement: the Commission has adopted a Recommendation asking Member States to resettle 20,000 people from outside the EU, in clear need of international protection as identified by the UNHCR, over 2 years, based on a distribution key. Member States who participate in the scheme will be entitled to financial support, with the EU making 50 million Euro available in 2015-16.

An EU Action plan against migrant smuggling

The Plan for 2015-2020 sets out concrete actions to prevent and counter migrant smuggling. Actions include setting up a list of suspicious vessels; dedicated platforms to enhancing cooperation and exchange of information with financial institutions; and cooperating with internet service providers and social media to ensure internet content used by smugglers to advertise their activities is swiftly detected and removed.

For the EU's common asylum system to work effectively, migrants need to be systematically fingerprinted upon arrival. The Commission services have published guidelines for Member States setting out a best practices approach for fingerprinting newly arrived applicants for international protection. 'Hotspot' teams from EASO, Frontex and Europol will work on the ground to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants and assess those who are in need of protection.

About a public consultation on the future of the Blue Card Directive, the Commission wants to improve the existing EU Blue Card scheme, which aims to make it easier for highly skilled people to come and work in the EU but is currently scarcely used. The public consultation invites stakeholders (migrants, employers, governmental organizations, trade unions, NGOs, employment agencies, etc.) to share their views on the EU Blue Card and how it can be improved.

The Commission also takes note of a new Operational Plan for Operation Triton. The new Operational Plan for the reinforced Joint Operation Triton sets out the new number of assets: 10 maritime, 33 land and 8 air assets, and 121 human resources. The Operational Plan also extends the geographical area of Triton southwards to the borders of the Maltese search and rescue zone to cover the area of the former Italian Mare Nostrum operation.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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