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signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director

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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION

**SECOND REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL**

on the operationalisation of the European Border and Coast Guard

1. EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD – PUTTING IN PLACE A REINFORCED PROTECTION OF THE EXTERNAL BORDERS

Protecting the external borders of the European Union, including through the European Border and Coast Guard, is one of the key pillars of the comprehensive European policy on migration on which the European Union is delivering in order to address the immediate, medium as well as long term needs identified in the European Agenda on Migration.

The European Border and Coast Guard follows the concept and principles of integrated border management and brings together, in the spirit of shared responsibility, a robust European border agency with the border guard authorities of the Member States, including coast guards to the extent that they carry out border control tasks. The primary role and competence of the Member States in reinforcing the control of the external borders, on the basis of their own existing capacities of more than 100 000 border and coast guard officers, is essential to achieve this objective. The protection of external borders is the prerequisite for the normal functioning of the Schengen area without internal borders. The joint investment and engagement in ensuring the European Border and Coast Guard becomes fully operational as quickly as possible, are a practical expression of the commitment of Member States to share responsibility and demonstrate solidarity in the common interest.

The present report takes stock of the progress made since the First Report in January. It also identifies the next steps all stakeholders need to take to ensure that the European Border and Coast Guard is fully operationalised as soon as possible. The Agency's Management Board plays a particularly important role. It is the forum where the political priority given to the operationalisation of the European Border and Coast Guard should be translated to concrete actions on practical issues such as filling the gaps in deployments to ongoing joint operations or pools.

2. OPERATIONAL SUPPORT TO MEMBER STATES

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency continues providing the operational support on the ground to Member States in border management. The new annual cycle¹ for deploying the Agency's operational activities in the frontline Member States started on 1 February 2017 with around 1350 border guards and other relevant staff being deployed by the Agency at different sections of the EU external borders.

Despite these important deployments, the running operations continue to be confronted with gaps, both in terms of human resources and technical equipment as compared to the needs assessed by the Agency in accordance with risk analysis. These gaps have to be filled by Member States to ensure that the operational objectives of joint operations to provide the required support to the frontline border sections are not undermined and such a situation does not ultimately result in an emergency requiring the launch of a rapid border intervention.

¹ The European Border and Coast Guard Agency provides operational support to the frontline Member States through joint operations planned in the preceding year and taking into account risk analysis. The contributions are provided by Member States and the deployments are agreed in advance during the so called Annual Bilateral Talks between the Agency and the Member States. The latest contributions were set in December 2016 to cover the foreseen operational needs of the Agency in 2017.

The biggest deployments of the Agency are currently addressing the migratory pressures on the Eastern Mediterranean, Central Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes.

2.1. Deployment in frontline Member States

Greece

The Agency implements three different operations in Greece. Joint Operation Poseidon in the Aegean Sea supports Greece in border control and the implementation of the hotspot approach on the Aegean islands and of the EU-Turkey Statement. On 1 March 2017, the Commission adopted “*Fifth Report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement*”² which provides a more detailed overview of the Agency involvement in this respect.

740 officers are deployed by the Agency in the context of Joint Operation Poseidon including the support for readmission activities and 280 Security Officers, co-financed by the Agency, are deployed by the Greek Police. The deployment also includes 2 Offshore Patrol Vessels, 4 Coast Patrol Vessels, 8 Coastal Patrol Boats, one Fixed Wing Aircraft, 13 Patrol Cars, 4 Buses and 2 Thermo-vision Vans.

The Agency is also present through Joint Operations Flexible Activities and Focal Points supporting Greece in border control activities with the deployment of altogether 50 officers at the Greek-Turkish, Greek-Albanian land borders and the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia... In particular, The Agency has launched on 1 February 2017 a new operational activity in northern Greece in view of deploying European Border and Coast Guard Teams at the land border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania in order to step up border surveillance and prevent irregular secondary movements and to further reinforce the EU response to the challenges at the Western Balkan route. Twelve officers were deployed as of 1 February and additional ten officers as of 13 February 2017. The agreed operational plan foresees a gradual deployment over 60 officers, however, the shortfall in February was 42 officers and from 1 March it is expected to be 39 officers.

Italy

Under the umbrella of Joint Operation Triton deployed in Italy and in the Central Mediterranean, the Agency provides support of 272 officers including crew members of the deployed assets and experts assisting in the implementation of the hotspot approach. The deployment is supported with 3 Aircrafts, 2 Helicopters, 2 Offshore Patrol vessels, 3 Coastal Patrol Vessels. This support is expected to further increase in the coming weeks, when departures of migrants will go up again.

Bulgaria

The Agency continues to assist Bulgaria in controlling the land borders, also in view of preventing irregular secondary movements. The support is provided through Joint Operations Flexible Activities and Focal Points with the Agency being present at the Bulgarian-Turkish and Bulgarian Serbian land borders. The current deployment includes 152 officers supported with 6 dog teams, 7 thermo-vision vans, 40 patrol cars, 7 CO2 detectors, and 39 Smart-deck cameras.

2.2. Deployment in other Member States

² (COM(2017) 204 final).

Western Balkans

Around 100 officers are currently deployed in other Member States in order to assist border management in the Western Balkan region. The most important deployments are carried out in the framework of Joint Operations Flexible Activities at the land borders of Croatia and Hungary with Serbia in order to support border surveillance and prevent irregular secondary movements and to further reinforce the EU response to the challenges at the Western Balkan route. They are supported by 7 Dog teams, 15 Smartdeck cameras, 26 patrol cars and 5 thermo-vision vans.

European Airports

In addition, as in the past years, on 1 February 2017 the Agency launched Joint Operation Focal Points Air which acts as a permanent platform at the external air border to enhance operational cooperation between the Member States. The operational plan foresees to cover 37 major European airports in 24 Member States (10 permanent and 27 temporary deployments) until the end of January 2018.

While the Agency makes efforts to communicate regularly its operational needs through the so-called rolling open call, however, this important information should be systematically provided to the Member States on a monthly basis and the Agency should seek the necessary contributions through bilateral contacts with the Member States. The Commission is also supporting this process by including the information on the gaps in the weekly reports presented also to the Member States within the Integrated Situation Awareness and Analysis mechanism.

Next steps:

Member States should

- *Ensure that the agreed resources are always made available to Agency for the running operations and the mandatory pools.*
- *Provide the following resources on the basis of the currently identified gaps:*

Gaps for Greece (Joint Operation Poseidon)

14 February - 30 March 2017: 2 helicopters, 1 offshore patrol vessel; 1 coastal patrol boat (March only), 2 transportation vehicles

April 2017: 24 officers, 2 coastal patrol vessel, 1 coastal patrol boat, 2 transportation vehicles

(Joint Operation Flexible Activities at the Northern Greek land border)

March 2017: 39 officers, 16 patrol cars, 1 dog team, 1 TVV, 2 transportation vehicles

April 2017: 58 officers, 23 patrol cars, 2 dog teams, 1 TVV, 2 transportation vehicles

Gaps for Bulgaria (Joint Operations Flexible Activities and Focal Points)

1-29 March 2017: 63 officers, 28 patrol cars, 16 dog teams, 1 TVV

29 March – 26 April 2017: 74 officers, 23 patrol cars, 14 dog teams, 2 TVV's

Gaps for Italy (Joint Operation Triton)

17 March – 07 April 2017: 13 officers, 1 offshore patrol vessel, 2 Coastal patrol vessels

7 April – 5 May 2017: 4 officers, 1 offshore patrol vessel

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency should

- *In order to ensure the smooth and effective running of the operations and the mandatory pools, start to inform Member States on a monthly basis about needed resources and proactively seek the necessary contributions in the framework of bilateral contacts with Member States.*

3. PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRIORITY AREAS

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency's Management Board held its first meeting this year on 8-9 February in Malta. A number of important decisions were taken as specified in the respective sections of this report. The meeting in Malta was also an opportunity to hold a joint plenary session with the Management Board of the European Asylum Support Office where the roles of both Agencies on the implementation of Hotspots, data collection, analysis and information exchange as well as future strategic cooperation between the Agencies were discussed. On this occasion, the Agencies' Executive Directors have signed a Cooperation Plan setting priorities for common activities of both Agencies for 2017-2018. The Commission welcomes the closer cooperation between the two Agencies as key component of implementing the hotspot approach.

The Agency continues to advance the implementation of five priority areas identified and endorsed by Member States at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in April 2016.

3.1. Reinforcing the European Border and Coast Guard Agency's rapid reaction capabilities, including the mandatory pooling of resources

Regarding the mandatory pooling of resources to enhance the Agency's rapid reaction capability, the full availability of more than 1 500 border guards and other officers to the Rapid Reaction Pool has been confirmed by the Member States. In order to allow the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to verify whether the border guards included in the pool correspond to the defined profiles as well as to organise the required training, Member States should still communicate the concrete names of experts.

Despite calls made in the 1st Progress Report adopted on 25 January 2017, no new pledges were made to the Rapid Reaction Equipment Pool. By the end of February 2017 only 14 Member States – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia have pledged their contribution to the that pool. Consequently, considerable gaps still exist for most types of equipment, especially as regards thermos-vision vehicles, offshore and coastal patrol vessels, coastal patrol boats and helicopters, as compared with the numbers decided by the Management Board.

While the gaps could also be partially closed with the Agency's own operational capacities, i.e. through framework contracts for leasing services for aerial surveillance and renting of patrol cars, there is a need for the Agency to immediately re-launch the pledging exercise so the Member States who have not done so can fill the identified gaps to ensure that the pool is equipped with all types of equipment throughout the year.

Next steps:

The Agency should

- *Immediately re-launch the pledging exercise so the Member States that have not done so can fill the identified gaps in the Rapid Reaction Equipment Pool.*

Member States should

- *Fill the identified gaps of the Rapid Reaction Equipment Pool by the end of March 2017 to ensure its full capacity throughout the year. Particular efforts should be made by those Member States which have not yet contributed at all to the Pool.*
- *Communicate by 15 March the names of the experts to the Rapid Reaction Pool, so the Agency can organise the required training and verify whether the border guards included in the pool correspond to the defined profiles.*
- *Ensure that the experts nominated to the Rapid Reaction Pool according to the profiles defined by the Management Board are effectively available throughout the year.*

3.2. Carrying out preventive vulnerability assessments based on a common methodology

The reinforcement of preventive **quality control guaranteeing the well-functioning of the Schengen area** is clearly a top political priority for the European Union. The new mechanism implemented by the Agency to assess vulnerabilities in the Member States' capacities to face current and future challenges at the external borders is expected to considerably contribute in coming months and years to this common objective.

Intensive efforts are made by the Agency to implement **vulnerability assessments** process in accordance with a common methodology and the agreed calendar. The second meeting of the Vulnerability Assessment network took place on 25-26 January 2017 to further discuss with the Member States the collection of data on the existing capacities launched on 18 January 2017. In particular, extended clarifications were provided on the tailored template for the data submission and the way in which the Agency intends to handle classified information collected from Member States by setting the restricted IT infrastructure. In order to support the Member States' efforts to collect and provide timely the data, the Agency deployed on a temporary basis several staff members to nine Member States willing to receive such support during this challenging exercise.

By the deadline of 24 February, the majority of Member States (22) have provided the set of the required data. However, 7 Member States submitted only partial information and 7 Member States have not submitted any data yet.

In accordance with Article 13 of the EBCG Regulation, Member States are obliged at the request of the Agency to provide information necessary for the Agency to carry out the assessments. Clearly, the provision of the complete data on the existing capacities is a prerequisite for the Agency to effectively start the vulnerability assessment process. Once the information on the existing capacities is available, the Agency will perform an in-depth analysis of the Member States' existing capacities in conjunction with relevant threat indicators against a set of the objective criteria.

In that sense, the collected data will serve as an essential basis for running all sub-process of vulnerability assessments:

- baseline assessments of each Member State' capacities to face the current challenges at the external borders;
- simulation exercises to assess the future challenges at the borders carried out in relation to a number of Member States identified in accordance with the methodology;
- emerging threats mechanism allowing for constant screening of the situation at the external borders and which could trigger a specific vulnerability assessment.

Already the baseline assessments expected by April 2017 should lead, when necessary, to the Agency's Executive Director making a **recommendation(s) addressed to the Member State(s) concerned setting out the necessary measures** for the Member State to eliminate such identified vulnerabilities within a defined timeframe. The recommendations should take into account the Agency's risk analysis, the comments of the Member State concerned and the results of the Schengen evaluation mechanism.

Given that one of the key objectives of vulnerability assessments is to identify, especially for those Member States facing specific and disproportionate challenges, possible immediate consequences at the external borders and subsequent consequences on the functioning of the Schengen area, the recommendations made by the Agency's Executive Director should - **as matter of priority - focus on the most urgent vulnerabilities** in relation to the current challenges at the external borders affecting the well-functioning of the Schengen area.

Once the results of simulation exercises are available by the end of October 2017, the second round of possible recommendations, when necessary, should be considered in relation to the future challenges at the external borders.

Next steps:

Member States should

- *For those Member States [Austria, Denmark, Germany, , Greece, Malta, Portugal and Spain] who failed to meet the deadline to submit the necessary data on existing capacities, to do so as a matter of urgency and in any event no later than 10 March 2017.*
- *For all Member States, to respond swiftly to requests from the Agency for supplementary information, especially in case of a partial submission of data, to ensure that all information is satisfactorily complemented no later than 10 March 2017.*

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency should

- *Ensure a prioritisation for identifying the most urgent vulnerabilities based on the first results of the vulnerability assessment process and other information.*
- *Carry out baseline assessments on the current challenges for all the Member States by the end of April 2017.*
- *When necessary, based on the results of baseline assessments, the Executive Director should by the end of May 2017 make recommendations to the relevant Member States to address as a matter of priority the most urgent vulnerabilities.*

3.3. Support for return

The pace of return operations organised by the Agency continues to grow. Between 12 January and 27 February 2017, the Agency organised 44 return operations flights for the return of third-country nationals, reaching a total number of 2 116 people returned in 2017.

Since 7 January 2017, **three new pools** of forced-return monitors, forced-return escorts and return specialists are available for operations. As of 20 February 2017, 25 Member States have contributed to these pools by providing 518 of the 690 experts that are needed. **Member States that did not contribute to the pools – Cyprus, Sweden, Liechtenstein and Switzerland – need to do so as a matter of urgency.** All Member States need to **fill the gaps**, in particular for **the pool of forced return escorts where only 386 experts, out of the total 600 requested, were offered.** Member States, in cooperation with the Agency, should ensure that all the skills and expertise required to carry out return related activities are adequately represented in the pool of return specialists. This is of particular importance in the light of the increasing number of return operations compared to the past years, and taking into account the need for return interventions that may emerge in the coming months.

It is necessary to provide clarity on the practical modalities and on the rules concerning the deployment of pool members, as well as on their operational tasks and legal responsibilities. The Agency needs to define these elements, providing a solid frame to the work of the pools and ensuring that they are ready for deployment.

Following the entry into force of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation, the Agency has the possibility to propose to Member States, on its own initiative, the organisation of return operations based on information provided by Member States every month about the indicative planning of their return operations, including on the number of returnees and third countries of return. Member States are not yet regularly providing this information and should start doing so as a matter of urgency so that the full potential of the instrument can be realised.

To face the additional workload and to fully meet the expectations linked to the new mandate, the Agency should take immediate action to ensure that available staff positions are filled and that the budget allocated to return activities is fully used.

In the Communication "on a more effective return policy in the European Union – a renewed Action Plan"³, published on the same day as this Report, the Commission is proposing additional measures and actions for the Agency to carry out in the coming months in order to further step up its support to Member States in conducting return activities. Progress will be monitored in the next report on the operationalisation of the European Border and Coast Guard.

Next steps:

The Agency should

- *Define the practical modalities, rules, operational tasks and legal responsibilities for the deployment of the pools' members to ensure that the pools are ready for deployment by the end of May at the latest.*
- *Fill the available staff positions allocated to return activities by June 2017.*
- *Ensure that financial resources allocated to return activities are fully used.*

³

COM(2017) 200

The Member States should

- *Contribute to the pools – if they have not done it so far [Cyprus, Italy, Sweden, Liechtenstein and Switzerland] – by the end of March at the latest.*
- *Fill the gaps in the pools and ensure that all profiles are adequately represented, by the end of March at the latest.*
- *Immediately start providing, on a monthly basis, information about the indicative planning of national return operations, including on the number of returnees and third countries of return.*

3.4. Setting up of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency's complaint mechanism

As for the **complaint mechanism**, two new complaints were submitted to the Agency between mid-January and mid February 2017, however, both were considered as inadmissible by the Fundamental Rights Officer.

The Agency still needs to improve the information dissemination on the mechanism, including the visual accessibility of complaint forms at the Agency's website as well as the paper distribution of the relevant materials in the locations where the Agency's deployment take place.

The Fundamental Rights Officer is expected to receive in 2017 one additional post to support her tasks, the relevant recruitment procedure still needs to be launched. Moreover, the Agency needs to further examine the staffing needs for the Fundamental Rights Officer in view of the possible workload related to the implementation of the mechanism in a long term as well as in relation of the mainstreaming of fundamental rights in the Agency's operational activities.

Next steps:

The Agency should

- *Improve the dissemination of the information materials, related to the complaint mechanism, including to ensure better accessibility of the complaints forms on its website, by the end of March.*

3.5. Paving the way for better operational cooperation with priority third countries by setting a model status agreement

As regards, the Agency's operational cooperation with priority third countries, the Management Board at its meeting on 8-9 February has authorised the Executive Director to open negotiation for a working arrangement for the cooperation with Niger.

On 25 January 2017, the Commission adopted recommendations to the Council to authorise the opening of negotiations with Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to agree on **the status agreements** required for the deployment of the European Border and Coast Guards teams in these countries. The Commission welcomes the fast progress in the Council and hopes for the swift adoption of the relevant decisions to start formal negotiations. The competent authorities of the third countries concerned must nonetheless complete the necessary internal procedures for negotiating the agreements with the Commission. Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are expected to complete the necessary internal procedures in the weeks to come. The Commission is in constant contact with the authorities of these two countries, so that the formal negotiations can start whenever these two

countries ready. The Commission aims at concluding the agreements with Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as quickly as possible.

Next steps:

The Council should

- *authorise swiftly the opening of negotiations with Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the respective status agreements*

The Commission is in regular contact with Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and ready to start negotiations the moment the formal mandate is agreed

3.6. Headquarters agreement

The Commission welcomes that the Agency and Poland have finalised technical discussions and initialled the draft headquarters agreement on 23 January 2017. The draft Headquarters Agreement clarifies and establishes, among others, the legal status of the Agency, the immunities, privileges and tax exemptions accorded to the Agency, its staff and their family members, the exact scope of diplomatic status granted to certain categories of staff and the European schooling in Warsaw. It also includes provisions on the new headquarter building of the Agency in Warsaw.

The Management Board at its meeting on 8-9 February 2017 approved the draft Agreement giving the Executive Director the possibility to conclude the Agreement on behalf of the Agency. According to the Polish law, the draft agreement must be ratified by the Polish Parliament before it is finally signed.

Next steps:

Poland and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency should

- *finalise the conclusion of the headquarters agreement according to the respective procedures by 7 April 2017, in this context the Polish Parliament is invited to ratify the agreement before that date.*

4. EUROPEAN COOPERATION ON COAST GUARD FUNCTIONS

In order to set up a European cooperation among authorities carrying out coast guard functions⁴, the mandates of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the European Maritime Safety Agency and the European Fisheries Control Agency have been amended in parallel in October 2016. The three Agencies play a crucial role in providing common information, surveillance and training services to national authorities as well as in planning and carrying out multipurpose operations in the field of maritime surveillance.

At the initiative of the European Parliament, an EU pilot project has been launched in mid-2016 to develop and test these services and multipurpose operations in close cooperation with and for the benefit of the national authorities. The project will be completed in mid-2017.

The Commission cooperates closely with the three Agencies to ensure full coherence between the different policy areas.

4 Coast guard functions may include maritime safety and security, search and rescue, border control, fisheries control, customs control, general law enforcement and environmental protection.

4.1. Integrated maritime information services

The European Maritime Safety Agency provides its Integrated Maritime Services, based on ship reporting systems and other surveillance tools, to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the European Fisheries Control Agency for the benefit of their communities.

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency provides the services received from the European Maritime Safety Agency via the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) Fusion Services support to the border and coast guards and to Joint Operations coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. These services include detection, identification and tracking of vessels, anomaly detection, and monitoring of departure points, thereby considerably enhancing the maritime situational awareness and reaction capability of border and coast guards.

The services provided by the European Maritime Safety Agency to the European Fisheries Control Agency facilitate the detection of “Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing”. As of 19 January 2017, an important missing data set, namely data on fishing vessels⁵ is being provided by the European Fisheries Control Agency via the European Maritime Safety Agency to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and from there to border and coast guards.

The European Maritime Safety Agency is also providing selected parts of its Integrated Maritime Services to a number of users outside of the European Union, as part of support programmes (including training and capacity building activities) to third countries in the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and Caspian Sea, for the purpose of locating illegal discharges at sea and the polluters.

4.2. Joint maritime surveillance services

1. Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS)

An important missing tool for maritime surveillance is the use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, filling the operational gap between satellite imagery and maritime patrol aircraft. For this reason the Council and European Parliament have reserved M€ 67 for 2017-2020 for establishing a joint Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems service for maritime surveillance by the European Maritime Safety Agency, together with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the European Fisheries Control Agency. In 2016 tendering specifications have been elaborated jointly by the three Agencies, and the framework contract signed in February 2017, covering both long endurance and vertical take-off/landing Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems. Following a preparatory phase of three months, including technical acceptance tests, this joint Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems service will be operational as of June 2017, with flight authorisations to be given by the civil aviation authorities.

To promote the use by national authorities, a demonstration of the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems service will be held in May 2017 in the Western Mediterranean Sea, showing its added value for border control, search and rescue, fisheries control and marine pollution monitoring.

To address the specificities of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency is planning to test the use of long endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems in that region later in 2017, thereby contributing to the

⁵ Vessel Monitoring System (VMS).

further development of the joint Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems service of the three Agencies.

2. *Fixed wing aircraft service*

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency has currently three framework contracts for multipurpose surveillance flights. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency has set up a web portal, which gives direct access to operators in the three Agencies and Member States, e.g. for real time video streaming and reporting. A new framework contract for aerial surveillance will be signed in the fourth quarter of 2017.

4.3. Capacity building and multipurpose operations

The European Fisheries Control Agency is currently developing, together with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the European Maritime Safety Agency, guidelines on interagency cooperation in the field of maritime surveillance.

All the previous elements described above serve one operational goal, namely to make best use of existing information, services and capabilities in multipurpose operations which are carried out by the Agencies in the Mediterranean Sea together with and for the benefit of national authorities.

Next steps:

All the Member States' authorities carrying out coast guard functions should

- *Use the services provided by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the European Maritime Safety Agency and the European Fisheries Control Agency under the EU cooperation on coast guard functions.*

The European Maritime Safety Agency should

- *Make the Joint Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems Services operational by end May 2017.*

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the European Fisheries Control Agency should

- *Make full use of the Joint Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems Services, as a matter of priority, in the Central Mediterranean Sea as of June 2017.*

The three Agencies should

- *Explore on a pilot basis how the information and services provided under the EU cooperation on coast guard functions could also be used for the benefit neighbouring third countries, in particular in the Mediterranean Sea.*

5. CONCLUSIONS

The second report shows that all stakeholders have continued to work intensively to roll out the activities and tools of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation to ensure a reinforced capability to protect the external borders is in place as soon as possible.

In particular, most of the Member States have provided the necessary data for the purpose of the vulnerability assessment which is an important step to achieve an effective preventive approach. Equally, the fast progress in the Council in view of the expected swift adoption of the decisions by the Council authorising the Commission to start the formal negotiations with Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia on the status agreements shows the continued political priority given to operationalising the European Border and Coast Guard.

However, further steps should be taken by the Member States to urgently ensure the full operational capability of the rapid reaction pools, in particular to fill the gaps for the Rapid Reaction Equipment Pool, as well as to continue joint efforts in supporting the frontline Member States in the effective management of the external borders with the requested deployments for the on-going joint operations. Member States need also to exploit the potential offered by the reinforced Agency to assist in the area of return operations by notifying their indicative planning on return operations.

The Commission invites the Council to discuss progress on the basis of this report and endorse the proposed concrete steps to bring forward the operationalisation of the European Border and Coast Guard.

The Commission will report again on the progress made to reinforce the external borders in Spring 2017.