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signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director

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To: Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of  
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THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL  
Fifth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries  
under the European Agenda on Migration

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Delegations will find attached document COM(2017) 471 final.

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION**

**TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE  
COUNCIL**

**Fifth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the  
European Agenda on Migration**

## 1. Introduction

This Fifth Progress Report provides an update on the implementation of the Partnership Framework, as well as the actions taken in order to respond to the lessons learned identified in the Fourth Progress Report.<sup>1</sup>

Over the summer season, there has been a reduction in the number of crossings of irregular migrants through the Central Mediterranean route. In the months of July and August, 15 373 arrivals were recorded in Italy, compared to 44 846 in the same months in 2016. Overall, 99 846 migrants have arrived so far in 2017 (until 4 September); in the same period in 2016 115 068 migrants arrived. According to the International Organisation for Migration, 2 410 people have died at sea so far in 2017 while attempting to reach the European shores, but there were only 19 deaths recorded in all of August. These trends reflect the enhanced efforts carried out jointly by Italy and the European Union, in line with the Action Plan on measures to support Italy<sup>2</sup>, to step up cooperation with countries of origin and transit along the route, in particular with Libya, as well as the good collaboration with the Libyan authorities. The initiatives set in motion to reinforce the Libyan Coast Guard's capabilities for maritime surveillance and anti-smuggling are starting to bear fruit. New elements were also added to the ongoing cooperation with Libya, as a new multi-annual project to enhance border surveillance for Libya funded under the EU Trust Fund for Africa was approved in July 2017, for a total amount of EUR 46.3 million<sup>3</sup>.

Since the Fourth Progress Report, arrivals along the Western Mediterranean route have shown an upward trend, with the total number of arrivals to Spain in 2017 up to 16 August reaching 13 826, which represents an increase of 115 % compared to the same period in 2016 (6 409 arrivals), highlighting once again the importance of continuous vigilance against possible emergence of alternative routes.

Significant progress has also been made in establishing migration partnerships with further Western African countries, as part of the effort to reduce pressure on the Central Mediterranean route. In the Action Plan on measures to support Italy, the Commission included resettlement pledging for persons in need of protection in countries along the route, as part of a broader resettlement exercise launched by the Commission for 2018. The pace of implementation of programmes approved under the EU Trust Fund for Africa has further accelerated, with 169 contracts signed for a total amount of over EUR 1.2 billion across the three regions<sup>4</sup> as of 4 September, a progress which should be accompanied by timely project implementation on the ground.

Against this background, a number of weaknesses identified in the previous Reports remain. In particular, formal cooperation on readmission and return with some of the priority countries has continued to stall. This points to the need to identify and use appropriate incentives to bring to bear in the negotiations on readmission agreements, including through visa policy<sup>5</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Fourth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration, COM (2017) 350 final 13.6.2017.

<sup>2</sup> Action plan on measures to support Italy, reduce pressure along the Central Mediterranean route and increase solidarity, SEC(2017) 339 of 4.7.2017.

<sup>3</sup> Out of which EUR 42.2 million are funded by the EU Trust Fund for Africa, EUR 2.2 million by Italy and EUR 1.8 million by the Internal Security Fund.

<sup>4</sup> Sahel region and Lake Chad area, Horn of Africa, North of Africa.

<sup>5</sup> No conditionality can be attached to the needs based humanitarian aid in line with the Humanitarian Principles.

or to explore, if necessary, alternative practical arrangements separate from negotiated agreements leading to equivalent results in terms of cooperation on actual returns. The rate of return from Member States remains low, reflecting also the need to step up internal coordination.

Diplomatic contacts and multilateral discussion between the EU, Member States and countries of origin or transit have intensified over the previous months, including with the second meeting of the Contact Group for the Central Mediterranean Route<sup>6</sup> and the Paris meeting of 28 August<sup>7</sup>, reflecting the need for an intensified effort to capitalise on the progress made so far under the Partnership approach and achieve lasting results in terms of migration management along the Central Mediterranean route.

## **2. Progress and results**

### ***2.1. Priority countries***

#### ***Niger***

Cooperation with Niger continues to be good and constructive, including stepped up border control. Supported by EU experts, the authorities have now drafted the Action Plan of the National Migration Strategy, and both documents are soon to be formally adopted. A top-up of EUR 50 million to the budget support programme under the EU Trust Fund for Africa was signed on 21 June in Niamey by the Nigerien Minister for Finance, the Head of EU Delegation and the Italian Ambassador. This additional contribution aims at enhancing the state capacities in the sectors of security, counter smuggling, and include addressing trafficking in human beings. The first payment, amounting to EUR 10 million, was disbursed in early July. In order to support the resilience of those local communities that previously benefitted from trafficking activities in the region, it is essential that projects to support livelihoods and build alternatives to trafficking are fully implemented without delay.

Niger has continued to deploy important efforts to prevent irregular migration and fight smugglers. So far in 2017 a number of operations have led to the arrest of 101 people brought before court, 79 people arrested for smuggling related crimes as well as the confiscation of 74 vehicles and motorcycles. The number of Assisted Voluntary Returns has continued to increase; in 2017, by 1 September, some 4 000 migrants have returned to their countries of origin with support through the EU Trust Fund for Africa – International Organisation for Migration joint initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration.

The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace is also starting a project to improve basic services and resilience in peripheral regions on migration routes in north-eastern Niger.

Rerouting of migratory flows needs constant monitoring. Increased border controls, including by Algeria, may indeed be offset by a development of new routes. Information on evolving routes is actively exchanged within the platform established to this end by the Nigerien

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<sup>6</sup> Meetings of the Ministers of Interior of the Contact Group were held in Rome on 19-20 March and in Tunis on 24 July 2017. Participants in the Tunis meeting were the Ministers of Interior of Algeria, Austria, Chad, France, Germany, Italy, Libya, Mali, Malta, Niger, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tunisia, Commissioner Avramopoulos, and the Minister of Interior of Estonia, the country which holds the Council Presidency of the European Union.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/declaration-conjointe-relever-le-defi-de-la-migration-et-de-l-asile/>

authorities.<sup>8</sup> The European Border and Coast Guard Agency has deployed a liaison officer to Niamey to support the work.

Regionalisation of Common Security and Defence Policy activities in the Sahel has accelerated, and the progressive deployment of Internal Security and Defence Experts in G5 Sahel countries will help increase future cooperation with the authorities, also in the field of border management. The full operationalisation of the Agadez field office has allowed EUCAP Sahel Niger to expand its activities in northern Niger, increase the number of field visits in the different regions to implement projects, deliver training, identify further needs of the law enforcement authorities, and contribute to the mapping of irregular migration flows. During an exploratory mission in July to Madama, which is an important hub for smuggling of migrants as well as for trafficking in human beings, representatives of EUCAP Sahel Niger were accompanied by an expert from the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) Libya. Further visits, with increased and focused advice and training (e.g. on forgery of documents, drug trafficking) may take place when the security situation allows.

On this basis the High Representative/Vice-President is finalising a proposal for a further strengthening of EUCAP Sahel Niger and a dedicated mission will visit the country to operationalise the agreements reached at the Paris meeting of 28 August.

### *Nigeria*

Nigeria remains the main country of origin of irregular arrivals to Europe (in 2017, until 4 September, 16 671 irregular entries were reported) and one of the main destinations for return operations organised by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, with already three operations having taken place since June. The government deployed two Nigerian liaison officers to Italy, funded by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, to facilitate the identification of irregular migrants and increase the number of returns. Regrettably, it has proven difficult to set a date for the second round of negotiations on the EU-Nigeria readmission agreement.

It is important that the negotiations on the possible agreement, including on flanking measures to facilitate voluntary returns and socio-economic integration of migrants in their home communities, resume as soon as possible with the aim to reach agreement ahead of the next high-level political dialogue.

Nigeria continues to cooperate closely with the International Organisation for Migration to facilitate the Assisted Voluntary Return of its own nationals from Niger and Libya, with more than 2 770 having been helped to return so far in 2017, with support by the EU Trust Fund for Africa – International Organisation for Migration joint initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, and other donors.

Nigeria remains the main non-EU country of origin for victims of trafficking in human beings, predominantly women and girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the EU.<sup>9</sup> EUR 10 million have been allocated through the European Development Fund and the

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<sup>8</sup> With participation of the EU Delegation, the European Migration Liaison Officer and the liaison officer from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency deployed in Niamey on 1 August, EUCAP Sahel Niger, interested EU Member States and the International Organisation for Migration.

<sup>9</sup> In June 2017, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information report on Nigeria

EU Trust Fund for Africa to a project addressing trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants. The project to be launched in October will involve the Nigerian Immigration Service and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons.<sup>10</sup> This work would benefit from further support through relevant EU Agencies in cross-border cases of trafficking in human beings, as well as of smuggling of migrants, in particular with the involvement of Europol and Eurojust.

### ***Senegal***

Senegal continues to be a major country of origin of irregular migrants; in 2017 until 4 September, 5 526 irregular Senegalese migrants have arrived in Italy. In order to facilitate the identification and return of irregular migrants, Senegal has confirmed its intention to send a team to Italy. A proposal from the Italian government to the Senegalese National Police has been sent and a positive response is expected soon. A new agreement on migration has been signed with Spain building on the existing one and the long-standing good cooperation in place e.g. on coastal surveillance and financial assistance.

However, progress on returns from the EU has been limited. The number of positive responses to requests for consular travel documents remains low. The Memorandum of Understanding between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the Senegalese authorities, concluded on 2 June in Dakar, is to be signed shortly. The establishment of an Africa Frontex Intelligence Community Risk Analysis Cell in Senegal will be ensured under the already signed dedicated project led by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

In terms of Assisted Voluntary Returns, Senegal has facilitated an increasing number of returns to Senegal, with more than 1 764 returnees in 2017 until 1 September, of which more than 1 058 from Niger and 671 from Libya. Equally, a migrant smuggling network was dismantled by the Senegalese authorities in June 2017. Senegal is also finalising its national migration policy which will lead to the endorsement of policy and strategic plans supported by a project on migration governance funded under the EU Trust Fund for Africa for EUR 9.5 million. In general, out of the EUR 161.8 million allocated to Senegal in projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, EUR 104.3 million (64%) has been contracted. This includes concrete actions to prevent irregular migration, in particular in the field of employment creation.

### ***Mali***

Mali is in the top 10 of countries of origin of irregular migrants in the EU, and remains one of the main countries of transit. There have been 5 990 irregular entries by Malians to the EU since 1 January 2017 (until 4 September). The return rate remains low and cooperation should be stepped up. Some positive progress has been made in the delivery of consular travel documents for some of the Malian citizens already identified for return, but a speedier delivery is needed for the remaining cases. Mali needs to deliver on its commitment, made at

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([https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/EASO\\_Country\\_Focus\\_Nigeria\\_June2017.pdf](https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/EASO_Country_Focus_Nigeria_June2017.pdf)) and organised a Practical Cooperation meeting on Nigeria in Rome with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the Nigerian caseload.

<sup>10</sup> The recently appointed Director-General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons has also called for enhanced cooperation with EU destination countries for Nigerian victims of trafficking, to step up prosecution of perpetrators, including through joint investigations and operations, and meetings with Italian law enforcement authorities took place to that end.

the highest political levels, to ensure the effective return of irregular migrants who have been identified through *ad hoc* missions or other means and, more importantly, should move towards a more structured cooperation on identification and return, based on best practices.

The Malian authorities, supported by the EU Trust Fund for Africa – International Organisation for Migration joint initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, have continued their efforts to facilitate the voluntary return of Malian citizens stranded in Niger and Libya, with more than 800 persons having been assisted in 2017. In addition, support for voluntary return of vulnerable migrants stranded in Mali has led to the assisted return of 19 persons to their countries of origin since May 2017.

A national consultation process on migration took place in June to further develop the 2015 National Strategy on Migration. The process, which involved the diaspora, raised awareness also on the anti-smuggling law, further supporting their implementation and promoting dialogue on migration with civil society.

The political and security situation in northern and central Mali has deteriorated further since the Fourth Progress Report. To assist the government to exercise stronger control over border areas with neighbouring countries like Niger and Burkina Faso discussions are ongoing on the possibility to finance under the EU Trust Fund for Africa a programme<sup>11</sup> supporting basic social services to the population in the regions of Mopti and Segou. In August 2017, the Council also adopted a Decision<sup>12</sup> under Article 28 of the Treaty on European Union authorising a new EU stabilisation action to support the Malian authorities in countering the growing insecurity in the central regions of Mopti and Segou and to re-establish and expand the civilian administration in these areas. The EU is now extending strong support, financial (EUR 50 million), but also through the regionalisation efforts of the Common Security and Defence Policy, to the establishment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force that will enhance control of internal borders of the G5 Sahel countries and help fight against terrorism, organised cross-border crime and address trafficking in human beings.

EUCAP Sahel Mali has further consolidated its support to the Malian law enforcement authorities and related Ministries in the areas of border security and border management. For instance, the National Policy on Borders and its Action Plan were recently validated by the authorities, which should lead to a National Strategy on Borders. EUCAP Sahel Mali is also supporting the Border Police reorganisation and works in close coordination with the EU Delegation to provide strategic advice for the implementation of projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa.<sup>13</sup>

## ***Ethiopia***

Cooperation on migration has so far yielded mixed results. On the one hand, Ethiopia's efforts to fight against networks of smugglers of migrants have led since the beginning of 2017 to a decrease in the number of irregular arrivals of nationals (mainly Eritreans and Somalis) from

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<sup>11</sup> To complement the Programme of support for enhanced security in the Mopti and Gao regions and for the management of border areas.

<sup>12</sup> Council Decision 2017/1425.

<sup>13</sup> EUCAP Sahel Mali regularly liaises with the EU Training Mission in Mali as well as EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUBAM Libya.

countries in the Horn of Africa to the EU, compared to the same period in 2016<sup>14</sup>. Ethiopia is making further progress on its commitments towards the high number of refugees that it hosts – including through a comprehensive review of its Refugee Proclamation with the right to work, access to education, as well as freedom of movement – and has taken concrete steps to provide sustainable solutions to and increase opportunities for refugees; a significant step given that without such prospects refugees risk falling victim to the criminal networks. The overall political situation in Ethiopia also improved with the lifting of the State of Emergency on 4 August 2017.

On the other hand, cooperation on return from the EU remains unsatisfactory, and the return rate is one of the lowest in the region. Operational progress on the limited number of identified pilot cases continues to be very slow, and political commitment at the highest level has yet to translate into operational cooperation. Based on lessons learned from these pilot cases, the EU proposed a more structured procedure for the return of Ethiopians from EU Member States. Discussions on this basis will be pursued with a view to a positive outcome.

## ***2.2. Progress with other countries***

### ***Asia***

***Bangladesh*** is the top non-African country of origin of irregular migrants arriving via the Central Mediterranean route, and overall second only to Nigeria in 2017 (8 747 irregular arrivals in Italy in 2017 until 4 September, compared to 8 131 throughout 2016). It is also one of the countries with which progress on return and readmission has been most difficult. In fact, the rate of return has dropped by 14 percentage points between 2013 and 2016 with Member States consistently reporting a lack of responsiveness of the Bangladeshi authorities to the requests for identification of irregular migrants. To address this shortcoming the EU and Bangladesh provisionally agreed on standard operating procedures at a meeting held at the end of August in Dhaka.

A new EUR 12 million regional project on “Improving Migration Management in the ***Silk Routes Countries***” started on 1 August 2017. The project aims at maximising the development potential of migration and mobility in the region and towards major labour receiving countries, as well as at establishing comprehensive regional responses to migration and mobility with full respect of human rights and protection of migrants.

Cooperation with ***Pakistan*** on a Joint Return Operation on 20 July, coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, was very good. The operation returned 45 Pakistani citizens. The next Joint Readmission Committee, currently planned for September, will be an important opportunity for Pakistan to present further progress on readmission, including implementation of commitments of the previous Joint Readmission Committee in February. A study visit of Pakistani officials took place in July in Tbilisi, to observe the functioning of the EU-Georgia electronic platform for processing readmission applications, with a view to making progress on the similar project funded by the Commission in Pakistan.

On ***Afghanistan***, a workshop organised in Brussels on 13 July for the Afghan consular officials in EU Member States benefitted from a very good attendance and resulted in a useful

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<sup>14</sup> Research and Evidence Facility. ‘Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen,’ London and Nairobi: EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window) Research and Evidence Facility. [www.soas.ac.uk/hornresearch-ref](http://www.soas.ac.uk/hornresearch-ref)



exchange of views on the implementation of the Joint Way Forward and bilateral Member States' arrangements. The third Working Group for the implementation of the Joint Way Forward is scheduled to take place at the beginning of October 2017. Addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement as well as ensuring successful reintegration of returned persons remain high on the EU's agenda. This is done including through the implementation of the 2016 EU regional programme, where Afghanistan is the main beneficiary and a similar programme which is in the pipeline for the end of 2017. The security situation in Afghanistan has considerably worsened after the 31 May attack in Kabul.

### ***West Africa***

In 2017, 8 904 irregular arrivals from Guinea arrived in Italy until 4 September. In discussions on migration management, ***Guinea*** has shown a willingness to cooperate. Good practices have been already discussed and confirmed by Guinea and the EU. The next step is the concrete implementation of cooperation in line with these best practices. A technical mission took place in early July to Guinea to identify economic and employment areas to be supported in the framework of development cooperation. An action under the EU Trust Fund for Africa is being prepared, focusing on the socio-economic integration of youth to prevent irregular migration and further contributing to the reintegration of returning migrants. More than 1 185 Guineans have been assisted to return voluntarily so far this year from Libya and Niger.

In 2017, until 4 September, 8 280 irregular migrants from Côte d'Ivoire arrived in Italy. Despite several reminders from the EU Delegation in Abidjan to the Ivorian authorities, no comments have yet been received from ***Côte d'Ivoire*** on a proposed practical arrangement with the EU. Parallel attempts for improved cooperation through an *ad hoc* identification mission to some Member States foreseen for July/August also failed, as the mission eventually did not take place. Concrete progress is essential, as Côte d'Ivoire has one of the lowest return rates of around 5% and an increasing number of irregular arrivals to the EU. More than 490 Ivorians have been assisted so far in 2017 to return voluntarily to their country from Libya and Niger.

An agreement between Italy, ***Guinea*** and ***Côte d'Ivoire*** for the deployment of liaison officers should also be concluded shortly.

An EU high-level mission to ***The Gambia***, with the participation of some Member States, took place in early August, focusing on technical and financial needs for migration management, and led to a commitment of over EUR 20 million. The political willingness to cooperate with the EU on migration management was confirmed at the highest level, and will be followed up by discussions of practical arrangements. A national migration policy will be developed in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration, with the expected finalisation by the end of 2017. In 2017, until 4 September, 5 548 irregular migrants from The Gambia arrived in Italy. More than 1 345 Gambians have been assisted to return voluntarily so far this year from Niger and Libya, and the EU has confirmed its readiness to respond to the Gambian authorities' request for support to the sustainable reintegration of returnees. Two Gambian liaison officers are deployed to Italy to facilitate the identification of irregular migrants, with the costs of the deployment covered by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

Following the technical high-level visit to ***Ghana*** in May good practices to better manage migration have been shared with the Ghanaian authorities. Preparatory work for a short-term

identification mission to a number of Member States has also started. In addition, more than 250 persons have been supported to return from Niger and Libya so far.

### *North Africa and Middle East*

The EU-*Egypt* partnership priorities for 2017-2020, which were adopted at the July EU-Egypt Association Council, acknowledge the importance of managing migratory flows for the mutual benefit of both parties, in the context of the Valletta Summit and Action Plan. The EU agrees to support Egypt on migration governance and the prevention of irregular migration, trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants, as well as in the field of migrants' rights and protection.<sup>15</sup> The EU and Egypt have agreed to explore cooperation on voluntary return of migrants and addressing the root causes of irregular migration. The process to launch a formal migration dialogue is in its final stage.

Egypt has taken measures to control its borders and prevent departures from its territory (only three arrivals from Egypt have been detected since the beginning of 2017), but a more structured engagement could help address more comprehensively the dynamics around the Egyptian route and, most importantly, the management of stranded migrants in the region. Despite reinforced control at entry points, the influx of migrants and asylum seekers into Egypt continues, though at a slower pace. Egypt hosts a growing caseload of over 208 000 registered refugees, among which 120 000 Syrians and 86 000 of African or Iraqi origin who live with an uncounted and growing number of other migrants.

A general commitment to cooperate with the EU on migration was confirmed at the EU-*Tunisia* Association Council in May 2017, but no further progress in negotiations on the visa facilitation or readmission agreements has been made in recent months. In the margins of the second meeting of the Contact Group on 24 July, the Tunisian Minister of the Interior agreed to hold a new round of negotiations. The dates for this new round of negotiations are being identified. On the same occasion, the President of Tunisia expressed his willingness to help address the challenge posed by the situation in Libya.

The first contract of the Tunisian programme approved in December 2016 by the Operational Committee of the EU Trust Fund for Africa has been signed. Tunisia has expressed interest in having organised information sessions on the Seahorse programme. Commissioner Hahn visited Tunisia from 4-5 September to discuss economic development and cooperation in Tunisia and Libya.

A formal dialogue on migration has unfortunately not yet taken place with *Algeria*, but the terms of reference for such a dialogue were endorsed in June 2017. During his visit to Algiers on 19-20 July 2017, Commissioner Hahn described the EU and Algeria as partners in dealing with irregular migration. The country, which may become not only a country of transit but also of origin, has taken measures such as the deployment of additional 3 000 soldiers at its borders with Niger and Mali. In the margins of the second meeting of the Contact Group on 24 July, the Algerian Minister of Interior expressed interest in developing dialogue and concrete cooperation with the EU on migration, security and counterterrorism. As regards a concrete programme, however, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not yet expressed an

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<sup>15</sup> A EUR 60 million programme was presented under the North Africa Window of the EU Trust Fund for Africa in May 2017, to enhance Egypt's migration management, address the root causes of irregular migration, and support Egyptian communities hosting migrants.

interest in funding from the EU Trust Fund for Africa at this stage. Both parties indicated their openness to continue discussions to recalibrate potential projects.

Irregular migration flows from *Morocco* to the EU, mainly to Spain, have increased over the summer. In addition 4 786 migrants from Morocco arrived in Italy in 2017, until 4 September. In the framework of the EU Trust Fund for Africa, Morocco participates in the first cross-window programme of the North of Africa and Sahel-Lake Chad windows. The programme aims at strengthening south-south cooperation on migration through support for the implementation of memoranda of understanding between Morocco and Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. There has been no progress in negotiations with Morocco on visa facilitation and readmission agreements. In this context the EU stands ready to further support Morocco and Algeria in the difficult task of managing migratory flows and is ready to discuss further measures of cooperation in the coming months.

Work is also ongoing to ensure follow-up to the EU-hosted Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region, held in April 2017, where the EU reconfirmed its support to *Jordan* and *Lebanon* for humanitarian protection, sustainable economic growth, and the education and livelihood needs of refugees and their host communities. Jordan and Lebanon host a high number of refugees on their territory (namely Syrians) but up to now they are not countries of origin for irregular migration towards the EU. Migration and mobility feature as partnership priorities in both cases. These points were reconfirmed on the occasion of the Association Councils with Jordan and Lebanon in July.

### 3. Central Mediterranean Route

*Arrivals* via the Central Mediterranean route up to 4 September 2017 amount to 99 846 people, a decrease in comparison to the same period in 2016. By the end of August, the International Organisation for Migration had recorded 2 410 lives lost at sea this year. In terms of arrivals, there has been a clear downward trend in July and August. This reflects a number of elements, including a stronger border control capabilities by the Libyan authorities, a growing activity of the Libyan Coast Guard, the initial implementation of EU-funded actions in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and changes in the approach taken by smugglers.<sup>16</sup>

Work has been further stepped up since the adoption of the Joint Communication on the Central Mediterranean Route<sup>17</sup> of January and the Malta Declaration of February 2017<sup>18</sup>. The Commission adopted in early July an *Action Plan* to support Italy, reduce pressure along the route and increase solidarity.<sup>19</sup> It builds on the existing approach for the management of migration flows, with a special emphasis on Search and Rescue, work with Libya's neighbours, and return. In addition, it contains measures to increase solidarity within the EU and assist Italy with the implementation of its recent migration reform, for which the

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<sup>16</sup> EU funded research (Research and Evidence Facility: [www.soas.ac.uk/hornresearch-ref](http://www.soas.ac.uk/hornresearch-ref)) shows that a growing number of mainly Somali migrants are choosing to migrate to Europe via Yemen. This route is relatively new (first cited in 2015), and appears to be growing in popularity. There are reports that small numbers of Ethiopians are also embarking on this route. A key factor for the emergence of this new route appears to be the enhanced border controls exerted by Ethiopia and Sudan along more traditional trafficking and smuggling routes.

<sup>17</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: "Migration on the Central Mediterranean Route – Managing flows, saving lives", JOIN (2017) 4 final of 25.1.2017.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/01/03-malta-declaration/>

<sup>19</sup> SEC(2017) 339 of 4.7.2017.

Commission has mobilised an additional amount of EUR 35 million. The Council Presidency of the European Union and Member States agreed on a reporting tool to track progress on actions identified in the Malta Declaration's implementation plan as well as the Action Plan for Italy.

The *Contact Group* for the Mediterranean held its second meeting in Tunis on 24 July. In the Tunis Declaration<sup>20</sup> the countries committed themselves to continuing and deepening cooperation to address the root causes, smuggling of migrants and returns.<sup>21</sup> At a meeting in Paris on 28 August the Heads of State or Government of Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Chad, Niger and Libya, together with the High Representative/Vice President of the Commission, agreed on a number of measures to further enhance the work being undertaken<sup>22</sup>.

*Libya* remains by far the largest embarkation point and transit country, and is therefore a key partner – together with the countries of origin – for managing flows on the Central Mediterranean route. Libya remains a key transit country for victims of trafficking in human beings, predominantly Nigerian women and girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the EU. The International Organisation for Migration reports that the first six months of 2017 confirm the concerning 2014-2016 trend of a sharp estimated increase by 600% of the potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation arriving to Italy through the Central Mediterranean route.

The EU is pursuing its diplomatic efforts for the stabilisation of Libya. These efforts are underpinned by EU financial support from the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, enabling conflict mediation between leaders in the Libya-Niger border region and in eastern Libya. Rebuilding state presence through the rehabilitation of key public infrastructure and basic services under the joint supervision of the Government of National Accord and the authorities in Benghazi, Kikla, Sirte, Sebha and Obari is also a key component of the EU's stabilisation work; through 22 projects, this cooperation has rehabilitated schools and hospitals and the management of water supply, sewage and waste. The EU is also closely coordinating with the United Nations as regards security assessment and possible increased presence on the ground.

The EU has further deepened its work to support the Libyan authorities regarding migration management, with a particular focus on Libya's southern borders. In July 2017, a EUR 46.3 million project<sup>23</sup>, co-funded by the EU and Italy, was approved under the *EU Trust Fund for Africa*, to reinforce the integrated border and migration management capacities of the Libyan authorities. The project includes activities to strengthen the operational capacities of the Libyan Coast Guards and their control operations, to conduct technical assessments for a fully-fledged National Coordination Centre and a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Tripoli, and to strengthen the operational capacity of the Libyan border guards along the southern borders. In connection to this, the European External Action Service and the Commission services are preparing, together with Italy, for a possible fact-finding mission to southern Libya.

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<sup>20</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_STATEMENT-17-2125\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-17-2125_fr.htm)

<sup>21</sup> In the margins of the Contact Group, Commissioner Avramopoulos held bilateral meetings with the President and Minister of Interior of Tunisia, the Ministers of Interior of Niger, Algeria and Libya, and the Minister of Malians Abroad of Mali.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/declaration-conjointe-relever-le-defi-de-la-migration-et-de-l-asile/>

<sup>23</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-2187\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-2187_en.htm)

This work inside Libya adds to the ongoing work on the protection of migrants and refugees, social cohesion as well as social and economic development of host communities, implemented through a EUR 90 million programme adopted in April 2017. Following the signature of the contracts, *international organisations*<sup>24</sup> benefiting from this programme have already started implementation on the ground. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has already started to distribute non-food items and conducted protection monitoring in detention centres located in Benghazi. The International Organisation for Migration has conducted several assessments to identify needs in terms of material support for detention centres, reception services during rescue at sea operations, humanitarian needs of migrants and internally displaced persons, as well as the health conditions and medical needs of migrants in detention. Meanwhile, both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and International Organisation for Migration continue to expand protection and assistance services at disembarkation points (e.g. documentation, primary health care and cash based interventions).

This work has resulted in a significant increase in the number of persons who opt to *return from Libya* to their countries of origin. Until 1 September 2017, the International Organisation for Migration has assisted 7 084 migrants to return voluntarily, against 2 775 for the whole of 2016. The Commission is continuing to explore ways to underpin this trend. 12 EU Delegations in Sub-Saharan African countries sent a letter to the relevant authorities, raising the issue of humanitarian returns for migrants stranded in Libya to their countries of origin. The International Organisation for Migration has been following up with the EU Delegations and national authorities to explore necessary support measures such as the creation of an online consular service piloted by the International Organisation for Migration to reach migrants outside of Tripoli.<sup>25</sup>

*The SEAHORSE Mediterranean Project*, which aims at enhancing the situational awareness and reaction capacity of North African countries on the irregular migration flows and illicit trafficking in particular those taking place in their coastal regions and territorial waters, was pursued. The scheduled training of Libyan Coast Guard is ongoing: two Libyan officers have participated in the Indalo Joint Operation. A Libyan Coast Guard officer was seconded to the Italian National Coordination Centre in July. The necessary arrangements are being finalised to support the trainings of Libyan Coast Guard after the summer both in Malta and in Italy.

*EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia* continued its anti-smuggling operations as well as the complementary training and capacity building of the Libyan Coast Guard. At the end of July, names of new candidate trainees were provided by the Libyan authorities. A total of 92 names were put forward who are expected to start the training in Italy in mid-September 2017, pending ongoing vetting procedures. On 25 July 2017, the Council extended the mandate of EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia until 31 December 2018 and amended it to include a monitoring mechanism of trainees<sup>26</sup> and to enhance the possibilities for sharing information

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<sup>24</sup> The implementing partners of this programme are the International Organisation for Migration, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the German Development Agency (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit).

<sup>25</sup> To date, discussions have taken place with the authorities and EU Delegations in The Gambia, Mali, Guinea Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. Concrete measures for further support are being identified with the Gambia (for Assisted Voluntary Returns from Niger and Libya), Guinea Conakry, Senegal and Mali (Assisted Voluntary Returns from Niger), and Burkina Faso (Assisted Voluntary Returns from Libya).

<sup>26</sup> On 21 August, the Operation's Commander signed a monitoring annex to the Memorandum of Understanding on training with the Head of the Libyan Coast Guard.

with Member States' law enforcement agencies, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Europol. In addition, Italy is also conducting training activities for future staff of the Libyan Coast Guard and has deployed a vessel in Tripoli, to support the operationalisation (technical maintenance, repair, etc.) of the four vessels already returned to Libya earlier this year.

In July, the Council also took an important step in the fight against smuggling, allowing Member States to prevent the export or supply to Libya of inflatable boats and outboard motors when reasonable grounds exist to believe that they are intended for smuggling of migrants.<sup>27</sup>

On 17 July, the Council extended the mandate of *EUBAM Libya* until 31 December 2018. EUBAM Libya is working towards establishing a light presence on the ground in October/November, possibly in conjunction with the EU Delegation.<sup>28</sup> During the summer EUBAM Libya worked with the authorities on border management reform for Libya and with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and the United Nations Development Programme on supporting the civilian aspects of the Tripoli Security Plan<sup>29</sup>, started to draft an operational concept for the General Administration for Coastal Security, and helped establish a National Counter-Terrorism coordination capacity. The deployment of one associated expert from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and another one from Europol to EUBAM Libya has increased information sharing, helped develop synergies and improved coordination of efforts.

On 22 June, the Commission and the Italian Coast Guard signed a grant agreement under the emergency assistance strand of the Internal Security Fund for a budget of EUR 1.84 million. Through this grant, the Italian Coast Guard will provide technical assistance for the Libyan Coast Guard to make an assessment of Libya's capacities in carrying out Search and Rescue and conduct a feasibility study, paving the way to the definition of Libya's Search and Rescue area and to the establishment of a Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre.

Italy has drafted a Code of Conduct for non-governmental organisations performing Search and Rescue in the Central Mediterranean. The Code of Conduct provides an important framework for improving coordination and effectiveness of rescue operations, as recognised by the Home Ministers at the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 6-7 July 2017. It would be important that non-governmental organisations operating in the Central Mediterranean sign up to and comply with the provisions of the Code of Conduct.

It is important to continue efforts to improve stability throughout Libya, to step up cooperation with and among Libya's neighbours, and to plan for continued training, protection and assistance, socio-economic development as well as Assisted Voluntary Return at the same level in 2018 and beyond. This will require the funding through the EU Trust Fund for Africa to increase, notably, but not exclusively, for the North Africa window. The Commission has, upon request of the Council Presidency of the European Union and Member

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<sup>27</sup> Council Decision 2017/1338.

<sup>28</sup> EUBAM Libya currently travels to Tripoli on an average of one to three times per week. Security and logistical staff will be able to stay overnight in Tripoli even prior to October/November.

<sup>29</sup> The EU Liaison and Planning Cell has also continued playing a major supporting role to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya in coordinating the Tripoli Security Plan. The Joint Tripoli Security Plan and, in particular the Joint Operations Centre, unifies the efforts of the Libyan Temporary Security Committee, Ministry of Defence, of Interior, the Presidential Guard and other Security Actors in order to return Tripoli to a normal pattern of life.

States, made an assessment of possible priorities and funding gaps, which will be further discussed with Member States in the coming months.

The External Investment Plan and its European Fund for Sustainable Development will help address the economic root causes of irregular migration by boosting investment and job creation, notably in Africa and the EU's neighbourhood. Following the compromise endorsed by COREPER in June and by the European Parliament in July, the final version of the Regulation for the European Fund for Sustainable Development should be approved by the co-legislators as soon as possible, in view of starting implementation without delay.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Managing migration along the Central Mediterranean route has remained a priority area of work within the Partnership Framework. In July and August, the number of arrivals to Italy compared to the summer last year has reduced. A number of measures put in place by Italy and the EU in Libya, in close collaboration with the Libyan authorities and key international partners (the International Organisation for Migration, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), and more broadly within the Partnership Framework, are beginning to bear fruits. Some important steps forward were also made with some partner countries, like Guinea and Bangladesh.

Reduced migratory pressure along the Central Mediterranean route provides an opportunity to make further progress on a range of actions set in motion since the launch of the Partnership Framework approach.

Enhancing domestic border control as well as anti-smuggling and migration management capabilities in countries of origin and transit contributes to dismantling smugglers networks, reducing outflows and enhancing security and stability. A stronger focus should be placed on border control in Southern Libya and in its neighbouring countries. Strengthening the work of Joint Investigation Teams, such as the one operating in Niger, and of Common Security and Defence missions operating in migration-sensitive areas, can bring further results. Efforts at regionalising CSDP missions and supporting the creation of a G5 joint force should also continue with the full support of Member States.

As success in dismantling smugglers networks often deprives local communities along the routes of a source of revenue, ensuring local ownership for migration policies requires the timely implementation of projects to create jobs and alternative sources of revenues. To that effect it is key that existing projects to foster socio-economic resilience in Southern Libya and Niger, already approved under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, are swiftly implemented.

While efforts at closing existing routes are beginning to show results, the EU should continue to be vigilant on the possible creation of new alternative routes to Europe, engaging with relevant partner countries and with the most concerned Member States.

Efforts to stem irregular migration should continue to be paralleled by strong policies to protect human rights and ensure dignified living conditions for migrants in countries of transit, in particular Libya. The successful implementation of the programme between the EU and the International Organisation for Migration of Assisted Voluntary Returns in West Africa and Libya points to the significant potential of this policy tool.

Work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on resettlement of those in need of international protection can play an increasingly important role. Member States should swiftly make ambitious pledges in the context of the wider resettlement exercise launched by the Commission.

Effective return and readmission remains key to provide disincentives to irregular migration and protect the integrity of asylum systems. Recent progress in pragmatic cooperation in the field of returns with some countries in Western Africa and Asia should offer a benchmark for similar progress with other partner countries. The EU will continue to stand ready to mobilise all relevant levers and tools, including visa policy, to build constructive cooperation in this area.

Finally, the scale of funding that can be mobilised in support of EU policy objectives remains a key factor for success. It will be essential that additional resources are made available by Member States for projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, and in particular its North Africa Window for 2018 and beyond.

The upcoming EU-Africa Summit will constitute an opportunity to take stock of progress made within the context of the Partnership Framework with African countries and to add new dynamics to the ongoing effort to build together a well-functioning and mutually benefiting mobility and migration partnership.