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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Summary of the Extraordinary joint meeting of the Committee on Budgets and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, held in Strasbourg on 27 October 2015

On 27 October LIBE and BUDG held a joint meeting with VP GEORGIEVA, in charge of Budget, and Mr AVRAMOPOULOS, Commissioner in charge of Migration and Home affairs, in order to discuss short and medium-term budgetary aspects of the migration crisis. Ms GEORGIEVA outlined how the proposed budget endeavoured to fully mobilise all resources available with the aim of supporting various EU policies addressing migratory challenges. The Rapporteur, Mr FERNANDES (EPP, PT) rejected the Council's cuts to Chapter 4 and called on the Council to put extraordinary money on the table to address the refugee crisis and show solidarity in practice and not just propose to redeploy money at the expense of other policies. MEPs across the political spectrum expressed concerns about the ability of the current EU budget to adequately finance external and internal migration related activities. MEPs also called for more transparency in the use of funds.

Mr ARTHUIS (ALDE, FR), BUDG chair, set the debate against the background of the Committee's visit to Sicily and observed that the situation had dramatically changed since July, with migration flows having switched to the West Balkans. He was pessimistic as to the ability of the current EU budget to be able to address the migration challenges. LIBE chair Mr MORAES (S&D, UK) stressed that the purpose of this joint meeting was to discuss short and medium-term budgetary aspects of the migration issues that would occupy the work of both committees in the future.

Ms GEORGIEVA stressed that the enormity of the crisis required a coordinated answer from the EU. The EU budget had been fully mobilised to underpin EU's activities. She stressed the role of the EP in helping open the flexibility instrument of the budget. The financial package devoted to tackling the migration crisis had doubled between the beginning of the year and now, from EUR 4.5 billion to EUR 9.2 billion. As for the external aspect of the action, resources were targeted to help Syria's neighbouring countries to host refugees, in particular by creating schooling opportunities for children refugees. African countries which were the source of economic migrants, would receive EUR 500 million in direct help and EUR 30 million in diary products. Moreover an African trust fund to which the EU budget and the European Development Fund would contribute with a total amount of EUR 1,8 billion had been launched. Within the EU the following five actions were being financed : improving the reception facilities, the return policy, the relocation scheme from Italy and Greece, the emergency assistance, and the reinforcement of FRONTEX and EASO, with MS contributions in particular by contributing skilled experts. Moreover, the Commission was available to authorise MSs' actions related to migration issues to be funded through the ESF and the cohesion funds. More funds had to be made available for EU development policy. The mid term review may represent a good opportunity to redefine allocation priorities.

Mr AVRAMOPOULOS provided figures concerning the costs of emergency relocation and stressed that transfer costs amounted to EUR 500 for each relocated person, while the receiving MS was granted a lump sum of EUR 6000 per person. Hotspots had started delivering, with first groups of refugees being relocated from Italy to Sweden and Finland. He regretted that only 9 MS had notified participation in the relocation scheme for the time being. Fighting smuggling networks and increasing agencies' staff (in particular FRONTEX) was also essential as the finger printing process needed to be improved. He referred to the recent request of Slovenia for EUR 10 million to address the migration emergency and the need for a medium-term action to increase MS capacity for return. He recalled that the Commission had asked MS to recruit more staff for EASO and FRONTEX. However, MS' offer of staff was not even half of what was requested. He recalled that EUR 4,8 billion were allocated to MS' assistance for the period 2014 to 2020 under AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) and ISF (Internal Security Fund). Both funds would be further strengthened. The Commissioner also mentioned emergency aid through AMIF and ISF for a number of MS, including Italy, Greece, Cyprus, France, Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria, Austria and the Netherlands. The Commission had also contributed EUR 500 million into the Syria Trust Fund.

The debate was opened by the BUDG Rapporteur, Mr FERNANDES (EPP, PT), who stressed that chapters 3 and 4 as well as trust funds and agencies formed the gist of Commission proposals addressing the migratory crisis. Council cuts in heading 4 were unacceptable, since this affected pre-accession aid and neighbourhood instruments as well as instruments helping the most deprived. He wondered whether MS were really ready to give their contribution to the trust funds, which he felt were at risk. He called on the Council to put extraordinary money to address the refugee crisis and show solidarity in practice. Refugees were victims and helping them required extraordinary money as this could not be just redeployed from other policy areas.

Mr NIEDERMÜLLER (S&D, HU), LIBE, welcomed the Commission's proposal and in particular supported the staff increase for EASO and wished it would be even higher. He expressed doubts as to the need for the proposed staff increase in EUROPOL. He wondered about the legal basis that would allow FRONTEX to organise returns and how this money would actually be spent. He also hoped that the future FRONTEX proposal would include increased accountability and transparency of the agency. On AMIF he noted that this included mixed objectives of integration of migrants as well as returns in the same budget line, which he considered confusing. He was doubting that amending letter 2 would be sufficient in the end. AMIF funds would be fully used by end of 2016 so he wondered what would happen beyond 2016.

Mr ZDECHOVSKY (EPP, CZ), BUDG, welcomed the strengthening of EUROPOL and EASO. He felt that the MFF should be modified to address migration flows, and include additional and overlooked aspects such as terrorism issues and drug trafficking.

Ms MATERA (EPP, IT), called for an end to the rigidity of the Stability pact and use of the flexibility instrument country by country, notably for Italy, to be able to deal with the migratory crisis.

Ms GARDIAZABAL RUBIAL (S&D, ES), BUDG, inquired about the EUR 3 billion financing to Turkey. Ms DALLI (S&D, MT), LIBE, asked for more explanations about the emergency EUR 1,8 billion for the Africa Trust Fund. She also asked how EU solidarity would be expressed in terms of EU budget, in particular regarding permanent relocation mechanism funding, once the legislative proposal would be adopted.

Mr KÖLMEL (ECR, DE) stressed the need to work on concepts and a viable strategy before allocating any funds. He asked for the creation of a uniform European asylum law and common protection of external borders, also sharing the costs. The responsibility for the refugees would then also be shared.

Mr TORVALDS (ALDE/FI), BUDG, felt that a spending framework needed to be set up after a clear definition of tasks between the MS and the EU. MS WIKSTRÖM (ALDE, SE), LIBE, insisted on the humanitarian nature of the crisis and deplored the low numbers of relocated refugees. This was a real crisis for individual refugees that suffered but not for the EU. The EU just lacked common responses in creating safe borders and an asylum system with the participation of each MS.

Ms BJORK (GUE/NGL, SE), welcomed the relocation measures, the permanent and the emergency mechanism as well as fighting poverty. She supported the strengthening of EASO but not the one of EUROPOL or FRONTEX. She denounced repressive measures at borders, the obsession with fighting the smugglers and the planned massive returns. She also asked for more transparency on funding so that it would be possible to distinguish between financing of repressive activities and poverty reduction.

Ms MARAGALL (GREENS/EFA, ES) regretted the EU's lack of response capability. He stressed that the creation of an immigration policy and a new fiscal program were needed. Mr VALLI (EFDD, IT), BUDG, asked that money be used in a rational manner and that controls guarantee agreed the use of funds. Mr WINBERG (EFDD, SE), LIBE, said that some MS were unable to pay their part of the EUR 3 billion contribution the Commission requested to address the refugee crisis. In particular her country, Sweden, could hardly finance its own social security due to the massive inflow of 200.000 immigrants in Sweden.

In her short reply, Ms GEORGIEVA gave some detail on how the Africa trust fund and Syria Fund were financed. She recognized MS had internal difficulties but money had to be made available for external action as well. She underscored that a clear distinction needed to be drawn between refugees -who should receive help - and economic migrants. The return policy for the latter needed to be stepped up. To this aim EUROPOL needed to be strengthened, together with the EASO, because of the registration needs of those coming to Europe. There were 120 million people in the world that needed urgent humanitarian assistance and there were only 200 euros available per person per year and funds therefore needed to be concentrated.

In his response Mr AVRAMOPOULOS stressed the valuable work of the agencies that prompted the need for more human resources with appropriate expertise. He told Mr NIEDERMÜLLER that FRONTEX already had a legal basis allowing action for return policies. The Commission would propose a revision of the FRONTEX Regulation in order to include border guards activities. It was important to balance activities of taking in refugees and returning those that were not in need of international protection.
