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Delegations will find attached the declassified version of the above document.

The text of this document is identical to the previous version.



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**CIREFI 22
COMIX 368**

NOTE

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| of : | CIREFI |
| to : | Migration and Expulsion, Visa and Frontiers Working Parties, Multidisciplinary Group on Organised Crime (MDG), Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum |
| Subject : | Situation report on current knowledge on illegal immigration and facilitation - Situation as at 22 March 2000 |

Delegations will find in annex a situation report, based on information exchanged by delegations at the CIREFI/ Mixed Committee (Iceland and Norway) meeting held on 22 March 2000.

This report is directly submitted for information to the competent working parties as well as the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum.

Situation report on current knowledge on illegal immigration and facilitation

(situation as at 22 March 2000)

General trends

The Finnish delegation reported that Finland had experienced a flow of asylum seekers arriving from Eastern Europe, in particular Roma from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In January and February 2000, 286 migrants (163 in February 2000) arrived from Poland, 12 migrants arrived from the Czech Republic (5 in January and 7 in February 2000) and 174 from Slovakia (all in January 2000 as no Slovak migrants arrived in February 2000 due to the reintroduction of visa obligation for Slovakia on 15 January 2000). All of these migrants applied for asylum. The route used to enter Finland is mainly via Sweden by ferry boat.

It also referred to a new phenomenon i.e. African migrants who had arrived in Finland and applied for asylum. They claimed to be members of a special international organisation "Head Master International Secret Organisation" and claimed that this organisation was persecuted in their country of origin. The majority of these African asylum seekers came from Cameroon, one came from Angola. They tried to enter Finland via various European airports.

The German delegation indicated that the situation regarding illegal immigration in January and February 2000 was comparable to that of previous months. The number of immigrants from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had, however, decreased. It stated that a large number of facilitators were apprehended (40 cases were identified). The "hot spot" for illegal entry was still the German-Czech border. Finally, it referred to the cooperation between German, Austrian and Italian forces in the fight against human smuggling which had led to a drop in the number of immigrants found hiding in cargo trains.

The Austrian delegation stated that since the end of February 2000, over a four-week period, 2 000 immigrants had been turned back at the border (most of them were Poles, Slovaks and Romanians) and 210 facilitators arrested (most of them were Yugoslavs (35)). 1 020 immigrants had been smuggled (most of them Afghans) and 820 removed.

The United Kingdom delegation reported that the number of illegal immigrants and asylum

applications had increased considerably at the end of 1999. Since the beginning of 2000, the situation had stabilised. A change had been noticed, however, in the nationality of the immigrants: in previous months, most immigrants had come from the Central and Eastern European countries (to work illegally in agriculture and, once detected, had applied for asylum) and Kosovo. Since February 2000, for the first time the majority of migrants came from China.

The United Kingdom delegation also mentioned the opening of a special detention centre in Oakington. This is for the detention of migrants who, once identified, can be repatriated without problem. The removal decision is, in principle, taken within a week after the person's detection. In case of appeal against the removal decision, a new decision is taken within two weeks. In general, people stay from four to six weeks at this centre. The aim is to discourage illegal immigrants paying large amounts to facilitators.

The Netherlands delegation reported that the situation had not changed considerably compared with previous months. The number of immigrants from Slovakia continued to increase in January and February 2000. The Netherlands government has taken special measures i.a. the detachment of an immigration liaison officer, started discussions with the Slovakian air carrier, etc. These measures have led to a considerable decrease in the number of Slovakian migrants at the beginning of March 2000. However, it has not yet been decided whether to reintroduce a visa obligation for Slovakian nationals. It also reported that efforts will be stepped up at the centres where migrants apply for asylum as it was noticed that asylum seekers often disappear from these centres.

The Irish delegation referred to an ongoing increase in the number of illegal arrivals and asylum applications (976 in January and 864 in February 2000). An estimated 79,7% of the total number of asylum seekers applied for asylum within the country. In January and February 2000 the main nationalities were Nigerians and Romanians.

The Italian delegation reported a clear drop in the number of people apprehended in Apulia, Calabria and Sicily in the first two months of 2000: 3 058 immigrants arrived compared to 4 858 in the corresponding period of 1999. This decline was due to the drop in the number of Yugoslavian migrants from Kosovo. In Apulia 2 698 persons have been apprehended since the beginning of 2000, compared to 4 657 in the corresponding period in 1999.

It also reported that 3 231 persons were repatriated and 6 551 persons were refused at the border. It mentioned in particular the successful repatriation of 77 Chinese nationals on 29 February 2000. As Italy could not identify these persons as Chinese nationals before the repatriation, it had committed itself to readmitting those who would not be identified as Chinese nationals by the Chinese authorities. The Chinese authorities had convened police officers of various regions in order to facilitate the identification. All 77 people were transported on a charter flight and escorted by 90 police officers together with the Chinese consul of Rome. They were all identified as Chinese. It finally stated that the Ministry of Interior and Foreign Affairs had been contacted to consolidate this repatriation system.

The Belgian delegation stated that the same system is used successfully by the Belgian authorities with one difference: the repatriations are carried out with scheduled flights.

The Icelandic delegation indicated that the situation was comparable to that of the previous months. It had noticed the abuse of tourist visas for illegal migration purposes and wondered whether this represented a new trend. It reported a case of 22 Lithuanians who had entered Iceland with tourist visas.

The Norwegian delegation indicated that 569 asylum applications had been made in January 2000 and 548 in February 2000. The main countries of origin were Iraq, Somalia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Russia and Romania. An increase was noticed in the number of migrants from Russia and Romania. As their fingerprints were recorded, the Norwegian authorities had discovered that 365 asylum seekers had already been recorded in other countries: Denmark, Germany and Sweden. The majority came from Iraq.

It further reported that 311 were returned in January and February 2000 of whom 92 were Croats and 41 Slovaks.

The Norwegian delegation also referred to a total of 6 000 Kosovars who had arrived in Norway and who were granted temporary protection until summer 2000. Indications, however, exist that many of them will stay when the temporary protection ends and that they apply for asylum. It reported that a large number of Kosovars who had been returned to Kosovo had already come back to Norway and claimed asylum.

The Greek delegation reported that the number of illegal immigrants in February 2000 had doubled compared to the corresponding period in 1999 (14 000 compared to 7 000 in February 1999). The creation of a new Border Guard in February 1999 had contributed to this increase in the number of arrests. The main nationalities were: Albanians (12 000), Romanians, Iraqis, Iranians, Bangladeshi, Bulgarians and FYROM nationals. The Romanians used a route via the Yugoslavian and Bulgarian border with Greece. The Bulgarians crossed the Greek-FYROM border. The Greek delegation also mentioned a police cooperation agreement, including provisions on readmission, between Greece and Turkey which had been signed on 28 January 2000. This agreement is still to be ratified by the Greek Parliament. It finally referred to close cooperation between the Greek and Italian authorities which had led to the discovery of a boat carrying illegal migrants.

The Spanish delegation reported that no significant changes in the numbers or nationalities of illegal immigrants had been noted. By contrast, the number of facilitated immigrants had increased. A recent police operation had led to the dismantling of a network which had smuggled 165 women from Belarus to Spain for prostitution purposes. 20 persons had been apprehended, 14 Spanish and 2 Germans. These women had been deprived of their identity documents and were forced to work as prostitutes to pay back their debts to the facilitators.

The Belgian delegation reported that 1 018 persons had been refused entry for various reasons. They were mainly from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (244: 162 from Kosovo and 82 from Serbia and Montenegro), Sri Lanka (108), China (100), Poland (62), Albania (60), Afghanistan (54), Romania (36), Algeria (32), Turkey (28) and Morocco (22).

In February 2000, 366 aliens were refused entry: 260 at the airports (coming from the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Romania, Rwanda, Guinea, Nigeria, Lebanon, Congo and Ecuador), 102 at the Eurostar terminal in Brussels (Kosovars, Afghans and Moroccans) and 4 at the maritime borders.

The number of asylum applications in February 2000 had decreased slightly compared to January 2000 but remained at a high level: 2 385 (2 896 in January 2000, 1 770 in February 1999). The nationalities concerned were : Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (471 - 385 from Kosovo and 86 from Serbia), Russian Federation (177), Albania (159), Democratic Republic of Congo (102), Armenia (100), Slovakia (71), Pakistan and Rwanda (both 70), Turkey and Bulgaria (62) and Kazakhstan (58). An increase in the number of asylum applications from Slovakia was noticed.

It mentioned a 21% increase in the number of asylum applications by migrants from the former Soviet Union (Armenia (100), Azerbaijan (24), Georgia (49), Kazakhstan (58), Kyrgyzstan (27), Moldavia (20), Ukraine (65), Uzbekistan (49), Russia (177), Tajikistan (6), Turkmenistan (1), and Belarus (24)). The Belgian authorities give priority to combating this immigration flow and are considering several measures i.a. information campaigns in the countries of origin, detachment of immigration liaison officers, etc.

The Belgian delegation furthermore reported an increase of Roma from Slovakia, Kosovo and Romania and a significant increase in the number of asylum applications from Palestinian and Lebanese nationals at Zaventem airport.

Finally it recalled the phenomenon of illegal transportation through Belgium of people hidden in lorries. 691 people had been apprehended. During the Kosovo crisis most of the persons found were Kosovars or claimed to be Kosovars, but now various nationalities had been encountered: Kosovars (278), Sri Lankans (88), Chinese (78), Afghans (63), Albanians (45), Romanians (45) and Turks (36). It was also noticed that many of these migrants had been found in the port area of Zeebrugge, whereas previously they had mostly been found in the parking areas of motorways heading towards the coastal ports. Shipping companies have hired security companies to control parking areas and lorries in the port.

The Swedish delegation indicated that no major changes had been registered in the number of illegal migrants compared to autumn 1999. In January and February 2000, 1 928 asylum applications were lodged. About 50% of all applications were made inside the country and not upon arrival at the border. 1 400 migrants were found without identity documents. The majority were Iraqis (600), Bosnians, Yugoslavs, Iranians, Somalis and Russians.

It also reported that migrants often enter Sweden with a visa but then attempt to stay illegally after the visa has expired.

Under the early-warning system Sweden had informed Member States about a boat carrying 108 immigrants coming from Lithuania and Latvia which had arrived at the port of Malmö after a stopover in Poland. The Polish authorities had informed the Swedish authorities. The 108 migrants had used a collective ticket and claimed to be members of a group of evangelists. They were sent back to Poland.

The French delegation reported that migration pressure continued to be high, particularly at the border between France and Italy. The illegal immigrants were mainly Moroccans, Chinese, Egyptians, Pakistanis and Indians. A considerable increase was noticed in the number of Egyptians, Turks, Pakistanis, Indians and Chinese. 1 220 persons had applied for asylum at the borders in January and February 2000 which represented an increase of 92% compared to 1999 (630 applications). 1 082 people were granted asylum. 100 facilitators were apprehended as well as 300 illegal migrants.

The Portuguese delegation indicated that migratory pressure from Eastern Europe, Moldavia and Ukraine continued to be high at the land borders with a number of them entering Portugal by car, train or bus with valid passports and short term visas, normally tourist visas, often obtained in embassies in Kiev or through agencies.

434 persons were refused entry (from Brazil, Angola and Guinea-Bissau). 466 expulsion procedures were started. 102 took place (87 administrative and 15 judicial expulsions) concerning mainly Ukrainians, Moldovans and Romanians. 366 requests for readmission were made. The main nationalities involved were: Ukrainians, Romanians, Moldovans, Russians and nationals of Guinea-Bissau.

It also reported to have encountered problems involving small groups of immigrants, in particular nationals from Moldova, Ukraine and Russia.

Moreover, it stated that rumours about a new regularisation procedure in Portugal had caused increased migratory pressure at the Portuguese borders.

Specific cases (e.g. incidents involving groups of illegal immigrants)

The Irish delegation reported a case of 53 immigrants which had been found in a boat at the port of Rosslare (South East Ireland) in the middle of March 2000: 27 Romanians, 8 Nigerians, 6 Angolans, 9 Congolese, 1 Togolese and 2 Ukrainians. Two persons were found with forged Portuguese identity documents and stated that their passage had been organised by a Frenchman, who had deprived them of their identity documents. All 53 immigrants applied for asylum. The immigrants from Africa claimed to be members of a religious group.

The Italian delegation stated that two boats ("Mech" and "Pigra"), carrying 301 and 144 immigrants respectively, had been intercepted at sea in the Calabria area. Intelligence showed that these boats came from Turkey (Sarköy and Izmit) and that the migrants had paid 4 000 DM/person (for children a lesser fare was charged). Most were Turkish nationals of Kurdish origin followed by some Iraqis and Senegalese. The crew, two Russians and 15 Ukrainians, were arrested.

The Norwegian delegation reported the following cases:

- A group of undocumented Somalis arrived in Norway and applied for asylum. They arrived by plane from Dubai.

- An Iraqi national was arrested in Norway coming from Sweden. He was charged for smuggling and the Danish and Norwegian police are cooperating to find out whether there is an illegal immigration network involved.
- On 10 February 2000, 2 Ukrainians were arrested on a train from Stockholm to Oslo. These persons did not have any documents except a boarding card from a ferry coming from Sweden. It turned out that they belonged to a group of 38 persons.

Finally, the Norwegian delegation reported the arrest of a Swedish facilitator who was apprehended at the border. 6 Iraqis were found in his car, 4 of them applied for asylum. When his flat was searched, pistols and two Danish identity cards were found.

The Greek delegation reported three cases:

- the detection of a network of slave trafficking in Athens on 6 February 2000. 9 Pakistani facilitators were arrested. They kept 35 migrants (Bangladeshi, Pakistanis and Romanians) as hostage and claimed money to release them.
- the apprehension of two Greek facilitators in Evia who had smuggled 51 Iraqis by boat coming from Turkey.
- the discovery on 12 March 2000 of a network operated by two Turks. They tried to smuggle 300 immigrants (Kurds, Albanians, Sierra Leonians, Pakistanis, Ethiopians) of various ages, the youngest being 9 years old. All 300 applied for asylum. However 61 Turkish nationals asked to be returned to Turkey as they had expected to migrate to Italy.

The French delegation reported three operations against illegal immigration networks which took place in January 2000:

- the first operation, "Helvetie", on 10 and 11 January 2000 resulted in the arrest of 2 Chinese facilitators. For several months they had been smuggling Chinese nationals into the European Union using the Swiss border as the principle point of access.
- the second operation, "Cassius", on 12 January 2000 broke up an international organisation involved in the smuggling of Indians mainly. 41 people were arrested (17 were in an illegal situation) and 12 were removed. 6 facilitators were apprehended.
- the third operation, "Akhenaton", on 26 January 2000 lead to the dismantling of a family structure which was involved in smuggling human beings. 10 Chinese nationals were arrested and the person in charge in China was identified.

Conclusions

The Presidency concluded that the immigration flows generally had either stabilised or decreased in most of the Member States although in some Member States an increase in illegal migrants had been noted (B, GR, IRL, P).

An increase was particularly noticed in the number of illegal migrants and asylum applications from the People's Republic of China. In some countries illegal Chinese immigration networks were dismantled and facilitators arrested.

The Presidency also referred to problems in repatriating Chinese migrants found without documents. Two Member States had, however, experienced some successes in repatriating them through close cooperation with the Chinese consular and local authorities which might suggest a more open approach from China towards the readmission of its own nationals.

The Presidency finally stated that illegal immigration was a part of international cross-border crime and it encouraged bilateral cooperation between competent authorities (such as that between Italy and Greece or Germany, Austria and Italy) which had led to the identification of some illegal immigration networks.