

Read-out of the Commission College meeting: opening remarks by High Representative/ Vice President Federica Mogherini

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The decision that was taken yesterday by the Interior Ministers on relocation is only one block of the building, but it is a fundamental one because it gives us the credibility to act with our partners on our external action that internal divisions were not giving before. So, I really hope that, on the basis of this decision taken yesterday night, we – both the Commission and also the European Council this evening - can today concentrate on what positive concrete steps we can take together as Europeans all together: on the internal and on the external side of our work.

The external dimension of our work on refugees and migration is probably the more fundamental element, but also the one that brings results rather in mid-to-long term period. There is no external action that turns reality upside down in one day or one week. This requires staying focused, coherent, consistent and keeping the priorities very clear in one's mind. There is, however, one element that brings immediate results, and that is what we have been working over these past days. I will leave it to [Vice President] Kristalina [Georgieva] to reveal the details of the numbers – but restoring the funding for the agencies that operate on the ground with refugees - especially in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and in Syria itself - is going to be crucial. These days, all of you ask: why is it so that refugees are coming to Europe now? One of the reasons is that the agencies operating on the ground have experienced funding cuts in the last months. So, it is important and we have taken the decision to contribute substantially to restoring the funds required for them to work on the ground and to improve the living conditions of the refugees in the region where they are at the moment. That is also the reason why we established the Trust Fund for Syria. Let me stress here the call, the plea, to Member States - all of them, and not only Member States, all States in the world - if they wish to, to contribute to our Trust Fund for Syria. We have an enormous amount of concrete projects that can be implemented if we have the resources, to make the life of refugees in the region, in the Middle East, more sustainable.

However, we know that money, particularly when dealing with refugees and with migration, is not the magic solution to everything. These days, we are focusing our very hard work on the political track and especially on the Syrian conflict. I have met recently Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for the conflict in Syria. We have talked again this morning on the phone. We are going to meet in New York. The European Union is putting all of its political weight to try and facilitate a solution to the conflict. And let me say that the credibility and the work we have done in reaching the Iranian deal can open some possibilities for different kind of dynamics in the region.

This will be, for sure, an element of further discussion and further common action of Europeans. But let me tell you that we have already intensified immensely our work in this respect over the last weeks.

One other element - and an important one - is bringing together interior and foreign angles when it comes to the Eastern route: the Western Balkan route. We will have, as you probably know, the High Level Conference on the Western Balkan route in Luxembourg on 8 October, bringing together Foreign Ministers, Interior Ministers – and not only of Member States, but also of the Balkans and of Turkey - to work together on the management of flows, on reception, and on the protection of refugees. We share a challenge and we have to find ways of managing the challenge together.

As we concentrate on the refugee crisis that flows mainly from Syria through the Western Balkan route, we also have to stay focused on the Mediterranean route. Media attention shifts very quickly, but we other routes that, until few months ago were at the centre of our attention, must remain in our minds. That is why preparation for the Valletta Summit is proceeding in a very intensive manner.

We have – as you know - prepared for the second phase of EUNAVFOR Med, that is to say fighting traffickers and smugglers. I will myself be visiting the Headquarters of the operation tomorrow in Rome. We will obviously also discuss this in New York next week at the General Assembly. Our Trust Fund for Africa, which is linked to facing the root causes of migration, especially in the Sahel in the Horn of Africa, is also ready for contributions, again from Member States and non-Member States. The initial contribution of the Commission is indeed quite impressive. Again, that is moreover something for Kristalina to address, but we need a global effort. We need a global coming together in order to face a crisis and a challenge that is not only European, but it is indeed a global one.

Developing a concrete national plan for managing together the flows of migrants through the country before they get to Libya is something we discussed with the authorities of Niger – not only in the capital city but also in Agadez - just a few days ago. All of this preparatory work will lead to October, November, to the Malta Summit and to concrete projects we will develop on fighting smugglers' organisations before they get to Libya, and to projects offering alternative, economic opportunities to the people in Sub-Saharan Africa, so that we can also eradicate the phenomenon from there.

Again, when it comes to the southern route, money is not all. Our work on pushing for a "happy end" to the Libyan crisis is hopefully reaching its final steps. It is the last mile of the marathon, which is always the most difficult one to run. It is now time for the Libyans to take final responsibility for the coming together of their country. We have worked with the Commission in these months to prepare a very substantial package of support of all kinds, to support a National Unity Government as soon as it is formed, from day one, or even from day zero when we have an accord. . This is something that I discussed with Bernardino Leon just yesterday night. The time has come and this would allow us to work in partnership with the Libyan authorities on management of the flows.

Let me stress again: this is only one part of the strategy. It is a complex one, as you have seen, and many others are there: the work with the African Union; the work with the UNHCR; and the work with the UN. You will find it all in the Communication we have discussed today, as a follow-up, as an implementation part of the Migration Agenda we have adopted in the last months. I really hope that Heads of State and Government this evening can seriously, quietly, consistently, work on the concrete ways in which Europe can contribute to solving one of the major crises we have in these times. It is not a European crisis; it is a regional crisis; it is a global crisis. It requires a global and regional response in which Europe is called and is ready to do its part together and in partnership with others.

Q: On the idea of a peace conference on Syria.

On the specific idea of a European conference on Syria, I said in my remarks that I'm working very closely and very actively with the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and the efforts that he is, together with the Security Council and the UN system, trying to put forward in these last days in particular. You might have noticed that yesterday he announced the formation of four working groups and the appointment of four coordinators for the working groups. We are actively and constantly working together with the UN on the path that is already in place, difficult as it is, as I said, with our angle –and our angle comes in particular from the strength that we have experienced in finalising the Iranian deal. I refer to that because this gives us a possible channel to work constructively with some of the key actors that have a concrete influence on some of the players of the conflict itself, in particular Iran but also Russia. We are working in that direction. A peace conference is always interesting to organise. But the key point is not having a conference, it is helping a process leading to peace. A conference can always be organised when it is very clear what the outcome of the conference would be and when it's clear what added value the conference can bring to the process. The point today is strengthening the process that the UN is trying to enforce in very difficult regional and international conditions. This is something on which I'll be working even more in the coming days in view of the General Assembly in New York, together with Member States, so that the EU's impact on this process, that has so far been led by the United Nations - and there are reasons for that - can be even more relevant. This is the path we are following. This doesn't mean that the EU is not playing a diplomatic or political role, but in some cases it is the EU in the lead of the diplomatic process, as it was the case for the Iranian deal. In some other cases it is our common, joint political decision to invest in a process that is led by someone else, in this case the UN framework; also because there is a regional and international context that goes far beyond the European one. But with a very active, very strong and concrete support from our side.

Q: On the lack of funding of international agencies.

I never said that migrants are coming now because specialised agencies have a lack of funds. I referred to refugees. I'm sorry to correct you on this, but words are important and when we have a distinction, when we analyse the background of the people who are

coming to Europe's door, it is a relevant distinction. Refugees, asylum seekers need protection. We have to keep the two definitions clear in mind. There is a difference. They are two completely different situations.

Indeed, the situation was known and in fact the European Union has considerably financed these agencies. Not only these agencies. Like Kristalina [Georgieva] mentioned before, the EU did not only support the UNHCR and the WFP, but also organisations that are working on the ground and that are not the big ones. I visited myself our office in Gaziantep, at the Turkish border with Syria where our people and plenty of NGOs and organisations are working thanks to our funds, also in Syria, since months. This visit took place not two weeks ago, but in December. Sometimes this doesn't reach the wider public; sometimes it doesn't interest too much the journalists unless you have a crisis afterwards. But the support to these agencies, the support to NGOs, the support to the humanitarian efforts we are doing ourselves in these areas has been constant and very high all over time of our mandate, from the very beginning.

And let me add one thing. In this refugee crisis we never mention one component of it because it doesn't reach Europe in a significant way so far, which is the Palestinian refugees situation. It is thanks to the EU funds that, in the end of August, we managed to avoid a major funding crisis of UNRWA, which is the agency dealing with the Palestinian refugees in the region, which would have led to keeping the schools closed for the Palestinian children. Thanks to our fast and relevant action we managed to guarantee that the schools were open for the Palestinian children.

There are also crisis that we prevent. They don't reach the news. But sometimes that happens also.

I don't like blame games. This is not constructive. I like calls to action or calls to responsibility. Our Syria Trust Fund is established since several months now. I've said it publicly, even recently. For the moment it is aimed at dealing with the refugees from Syria in the region and in Syria. So far it is supported by the European Union funds and by two Member States. All the others and all partners in the world that want to contribute, that call for major investments on the ground, are very kindly invited to do so.

Q: Sur la situation au Liban

Je viens de dire, pendant notre réunion du Collège, que notre attention et notre travail avec le Liban est extrêmement important. Pas seulement parce que le Liban accueille un nombre important de réfugiés, si je ne me trompe pas, autour de 25% de sa population totale; mais parce que c'est un défi pour le système du pays, pour les communautés locales, pour le système d'éducation, pour le système de santé, pour le système économique et social. La stratégie pour le Liban est premièrement de travailler avec les autorités du pays. Je vais rencontrer le Premier Ministre la semaine prochaine à New York. J'ai rencontré le ministre des affaires étrangères il y a je pense, une semaine ou une dizaine de jours à Paris, en marge d'une conférence internationale sur la protection des minorités au Moyen-Orient.

Premièrement, la stratégie sera de travailler ensemble. Parce que c'est seulement avec une connaissance profonde de la réalité locale, que l'on peut avoir les réponses pour agir de façon ciblée.

Deuxièmement, un soutien financier important. Quand je parle de soutien financier, je parle de l' appui aux pays de la région Liban, Turquie, Jordanie et Irak, qui accueillent la majorité des réfugiés syriens en ce moment.

Troisièmement, un soutien politique mais aussi un soutien sécuritaire. On fait un travail énorme pour essayer de soutenir, par exemple, un processus qui peut amener à l'élection d'un président dans le pays, parce que la force des institutions au Liban fait aussi partie de la force du pays: un pays délicat avec un équilibre délicat. Nous soutenons les forces de sécurité du pays qui sont elles-mêmes un des éléments de l'unité d'un pays qui connaissent des différences internes très importantes.

J'ai dit ce matin au Collège qu'il est très important de considérer le Liban, qui est un pays fragile du fait de la composition du pays, son histoire et qui est en train d'accueillir un nombre énorme de réfugiés par rapport à sa population, comme une priorité. Notre stratégie est la suivante : dialogue et partenariat politique avec les autorités du pays pour identifier les lignes d'action les plus efficaces; soutien financier à l'accueil, et pas seulement les camps, mais aussi les communautés locales qui accueillent les camps. Je connais bien la situation, j'ai été en visite plusieurs fois dans tout le pays. Enfin, un travail sur le renforcement de la situation institutionnelle et de sécurité du pays, pour faire en sorte que la résilience soit renforcée. La stabilité des pays auxquels nous faisons référence en tant que pays d'accueil des réfugiés est elle-même une partie très importante de la stabilité de la région. Si le Liban, si la Turquie, si la Jordanie, si l'Irak font face à une instabilité majeure, ce sera un problème en plus pour la région, qui sera impossible à gérer. Alors il faut investir dans la stabilité du pays et dans la force de ses institutions.

Languages:

Français