

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the High-Level Conference "Eastern Mediterranean - Western Balkans Route"

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First of all, let me thank Jean [Asselborn, Foreign Minister] in particular, but the Presidency as a whole, for the excellent cooperation we have had on the preparation of this extremely important conference that shows first of all the awareness of the fact that we are facing the same challenges. As we say around the Mediterranean and elsewhere, we are on the same boat and facing the same problems. So, we need common approaches and common solutions to these problems.

What we have seen this evening, and we will continue the work during the rest of the evening, is a team work at its best, for once. I know it is very hard to make the headlines out of it, but please do. Because having at the same table the different European institutions: the Council, the Commission, different Commissioners working together, Member States, Foreign Ministers and Interior Ministers, and let me add to the picture the fact that the Development Ministers were involved as well in the work on the migration and refugee crisis - we had a meeting in New York with the Ministers of Development last week; also the Schengen associated countries, the Western Balkans countries, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and the international agencies that are working on the refugee crisis in the area.

This creates around the table exactly the mix of people, institutions, responsibilities and tools that we need if we want to effectively tackle all the different aspects of the phenomenon.

And then it helps us also, as Europeans, to put things in perspective. This is something I repeat constantly. It is important for us not only to commend or thank Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan for what they are doing in hosting refugees. It is also time for us to realise that our burden has to be seen in perspective with the burden that the neighbouring countries to Syria are facing, and not since now, but since 4 years.

So, working together helps us understand better the problems and identify the solutions we can put in place together.

We have one specific advantage when it comes to this route. First of all, we have to be sure that we do not forget other routes. And this is why it is important the summit we will have in Valletta in Malta in the beginning of November on the Central Mediterranean route. And again, I hope that - and this doesn't relate to the Eastern route - but I hope that on the Central Mediterranean route we might have some good news coming from Libya soon.

But on this route specifically, we have an advantage, which is that we are talking with countries that have a strong, consolidated and long relationship, working relationship, among each other. Being that for enlargement process or stabilisation process or association process or neighbourhood policies. So, we have a consolidated framework that allows us to work together.

Has the cooperation been perfect so far? Far from, but we have registered around the table tonight the clear will to have this as a starting point for taking common actions in facing this.

And which kind of actions? I will be very brief. You will see the details of the declaration - or maybe you have seen it already – otherwise it is a matter of minutes.

Five main lines of common actions we have decided to do together:

First, common work to address the many root causes of the phenomenon, starting from the crisis in Syria. I have put the issue on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council that will meet here on Monday. So, for that specific issue maybe we go back to that on Monday. But we have decided with our partners around the table tonight to work together to start a political process - finally - that can bring an end to the war in Syria. Within the UN framework, within the international efforts that are made under that umbrella, but we need together with the security track, we need together with the humanitarian track on the crisis in Syria to have the political transition started. And we have agreed to do that work jointly, together.

Second, the support to the countries that are mainly hosting the refugees around Syria, and namely Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Commending them is not enough; we have decided to increase the humanitarian aid in these countries, to support the governments, to support the host communities and to increase the resettlement opportunities for refugees from these countries.

Third, we have decided together to support the transit countries, mainly the Western Balkan ones with series of measures and I know the Interior Ministers have been discussing also the rest of the day.

Fourth, to increase the cooperation on the fight on organised crime. You know very well our work against the smugglers and the traffickers on the Central Mediterranean route has focused very much on the fight against the criminal networks with the naval operation that is up and running and has entered its second phase just yesterday. We need to intensify cooperation on the judicial and police level on the Western Balkan route as well and increase and improve border management capacity on that route. Which is of different nature, it's not a sea border, it's a land border, in some aspect it's easier, in some aspect it's more complicated.

Fifth but not least, we have decided together to work with countries of origin of irregular migrants discussing return and re-integration of migrants not entitled to international protection, and, in parallel, discussing ways to improve security, social economic

conditions, educational opportunities in particular for young people in these countries of origin. Obviously this is less relevant for the Eastern route than for the Southern route, but it is also part of the picture when it comes to this route.

One last thing: the Trust Fund, one important part of our policy both for the Southern route and for the Eastern one is the establishment of two trust funds. One for Africa that will launch officially in Malta in November, and the one on Syria that is not limited only to activities on Syria - we have decided to expand the scope of the fund also for activities in the Western Balkans, so all over the route from Syria to the European Union. We have also increased the EU budget that now reaches 500 million euros and we expect European Union Member States but also other contributors, non Member States, international actors and players to contribute to that fund so that we can reach the one billion euros that would allow us to finance in a very immediate and flexible way projects to support the refugees all over the way.

Watch the video here:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I109499>.