



## Meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route: Leaders Agree on 17-point plan of action

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The past weeks have shown that the challenges currently faced along the Western Balkans migration route will not be solved through national actions. Only a collective, cross-border approach based on cooperation can succeed. This is why President Juncker convened the leaders of the countries concerned and most affected by the emergency situation along the Western Balkans route.

Today, leaders representing Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia met in Brussels at the Commission's Berlaymont Headquarters and agreed to improve cooperation and step up consultation between the countries along the route and decided on pragmatic operational measures that can be implemented as of tomorrow to tackle the refugee crisis in the region.

European Commission President **Jean-Claude Juncker** said: "*Countries affected should not only talk about and at each other but also with each other. Neighbours should work together not against each other. Refugees need to be treated in a humane manner along the length of the Western Balkans route to avoid a humanitarian tragedy in Europe. I am therefore pleased that today we were able to jointly agree on a 17-point plan of pragmatic and operational measures to ensure people are not left to fend for themselves in the rain and cold.*"

Concretely, leaders agreed to implement the following operational measures as of Monday:

#### **Permanent exchange of information**

1. Nominating contact points within 24 hours to allow daily exchanges and coordination to achieve the gradual, controlled and orderly movement of persons along the Western Balkans route;
2. Submitting joint needs assessments for EU support within 24 hours;

#### **Limiting Secondary Movements**

3. Discouraging the movement of refugees or migrants to the border of another country of the region without informing neighbouring countries;

#### **Supporting refugees and providing shelter and rest**

4. Increasing the capacity to provide temporary shelter, food, health, water and sanitation to all in need; triggering the [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#) where necessary;
5. Greece to increase reception capacity to 30,000 places by the end of the year, and to support UNHCR to provide rent subsidies and host family programmes for at least 20,000 more – a pre-condition to make the emergency relocation scheme work; Financial support for Greece and UNHCR is expected;
6. Working with the UNHCR who will support the increase of reception capacities by 50,000 places along the Western Balkans route.
7. Working with International Financial Institutions such as the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Development Bank of the Council of Europe which are ready to support financially efforts of the countries willing to make use of these resources;

#### **Managing the migration flows together**

8. Ensuring a full capacity to register arrivals, with maximum use of biometric data;
9. Exchanging information on the size of flows and, where requested, on all arriving refugees and migrants on a country's territory;
10. Working with EU Agencies to swiftly put in place this exchange of information;
11. Stepping up national and coordinated efforts to return migrants not in need of international

protection, working with Frontex;

12. Working with the European Commission and Frontex to step up practical cooperation on readmission with third countries and intensifying cooperation in particular with Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan; Commission to work to implement existing readmission agreements fully and start work on new readmission agreements with relevant countries;

### **Border Management**

13. Increase efforts to manage borders, including by:

- o Finalising and implementing the EU-Turkey Action Plan;
- o Making full use of the potential of the EU-Turkey readmission agreement and the visa liberalisation roadmap;
- o Upscaling the Poseidon Sea Joint Operation in Greece;
- o Reinforcing Frontex support at the border between Bulgaria and Turkey
- o Strengthening border cooperation between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with increased UNHCR engagement;
- o Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania will strengthen the management of the external land border, with Frontex to support registration in Greece;
- o Working together with Frontex to monitor border crossings and support registration and fingerprinting at the Croatian-Serbian border crossing points;
- o Deploying in Slovenia 400 police officers and essential equipment within a week, through bilateral support;
- o Strengthening the Frontex Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network with intensified reporting from all participants;
- o Making use, where appropriate of the [Rapid Border Intervention Team](#) (RABIT) mechanism, which should be duly equipped;

14. Reconfirming the principle of refusing entry to third country nationals who do not confirm a wish to apply for international protection (in line with international and EU refugee law and subject to prior non-refoulement and proportionality checks);

### **Tackling smuggling and trafficking**

15. Stepping up actions against migrant smuggling and trafficking of human beings with support of Europol, Frontex and Interpol;

### **Information on the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants**

16. Making use of all available communication tools to inform refugees and migrants about existing rules, as well as about their rights and obligations, notably on the consequences of a refusal to be registered, fingerprinted and of a refusal to seek protection where they are;

### **Monitoring**

17. Monitoring the implementation of these commitments on a weekly basis; Commission to coordinate with national contact points.

The full statement is available [here](#).

### **Background**

The European Commission has been consistently and continuously working for a coordinated European response on the refugees and migration front.

Upon taking office, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker entrusted a Commissioner with special responsibility for Migration to work, in coordination with First Vice-President Timmermans, on a new policy on migration as one of the 10 priorities of the [Political Guidelines](#), the political programme based on which the European Parliament elected the Commission.

On 13 May 2015, the European Commission presented its [European Agenda on Migration](#), setting out a comprehensive approach for improving the management of migration in all its aspects.

Two implementation packages under the Agenda, on [27 May 2015](#) and on [9 September 2015](#) have already been adopted and the measures therein are starting to be deployed.

On Wednesday 21 October, President Juncker [called for a Leaders' Meeting](#) on refugee flows along the Western Balkans route to address the emergency situation unfolding along this route.

Attending the Leaders' Meeting were the Heads of State or Government of Albania, Austria, Bulgaria,

Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia. The President of the European Council, the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU, the future Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees were in attendance. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex) were also represented.

**For More Information**

[Leaders' Statement](#)

[Factsheet – The EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#)

[Factsheet – The Rapid Border Intervention Teams Mechanism](#)

All press materials on the [EU Migration Agenda](#)

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