Fight against illegal immigration of third-country nationals. Policy priorities

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The Council endorsed Conclusions on Extending and Enhancing the Global Approach to Migration. The conclusions will now be submitted to the General Affairs and External Relations Council, for adoption.

The Council underlines the importance of the issue of migration for the EU and its Member States. It notes the first set of priority actions for the purpose of the Global Approach focussed on Africa and the Mediterranean region. Strengthened political dialogue, including the recent EU missions to Africa, and concrete cooperation with African and EuroMed partners on migration and related issues, including development aspects of migration, are important recent achievements. The strengthened capacity to manage the control of external borders, in particular through joint maritime operations, is another important achievement. The Council believes that these measures should be further intensified in the light of recent events.

The Council, while underlining the need to continue these efforts as a matter of urgency, also reaffirms the need to both extend the geographical scope and to enhance the content of the Global Approach in general. It calls on the Member States and the Commission to ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are allocated, within the existing financial framework, in order to enable the timely implementation of the comprehensive approach to migration.

1) Extending the Global Approach - Applying the Global Approach to Migration to the Eastern and South-Eastern Regions Neighbouring the European Union: the Council underlines the necessity for the EU to achieve a more efficient management of migration given the considerable numbers of migrants coming from or through the eastern and south-eastern regions. Existing cooperation structures in the region need to be enhanced and fully integrated in EU-relations with the third countries concerned, in order to create a more comprehensive and coherent approach. This applies, in particular, to dialogue and effective cooperation in matters such as enhancing border control, combating illegal immigration, organised crime and trafficking in and smuggling of human beings. This also applies to ensuring well-managed migration for social, cultural and business purposes and harnessing the opportunities to strengthen the links and synergies between migration and development in these regions.

As a matter of priority, particular attention should be given to strengthening the dialogue and cooperation with the regions directly neighbouring the EU, i.e. the countries of the Western Balkans, Turkey, the ENP countries – including issues that could affect them, such as the consequences of the Iraqi refugee situation – and the Russian Federation. Furthermore the dialogue on migration issues should be intensified with Central Asian and Asian countries of origin and transit identified in accordance with the migratory routes concept.

The Council invites the Commission to report back on the implementation of the Global Approach thus extended.

2) Enhancing the Global Approach - Circular Migration and mobility partnerships between the European Union and third countries: the Council reiterates that active consideration must be given to how legal migration opportunities can be incorporated into the Union's external policies in order to develop a balanced partnership with interested third countries. These would need to be adapted to the specific EU Member States' labour market needs as well as to the cooperation results achieved from the third countries concerned. The Council believes that these two concepts could make an important

contribution to a comprehensive approach, which combines measures aimed at facilitating legal migration opportunities with those reducing illegal immigration. Such a strategy could, in particular, be directed to promoting sustained cooperation with third countries along the migration routes towards the European Union.

The Council underlines that these mobility partnerships will be considered in those cases where they bring added value both to the EU and the third country on the management of migration flows and on the understanding that the willingness to contribute to this partnership and to cooperate actively is the basis for the opportunities offered by them. Such partnerships should, as far as appropriate, include the offer of legal migration opportunities, adapted in particular to the specific Member States' labour market needs, while fully respecting the competences of the Member States and the principle of Community preference on the one hand, and a genuine cooperation on preventing and combating illegal immigration, trafficking in and smuggling of human beings as well as effective readmission and return policy while respecting the protection of human rights, on the other hand.

The Council believes that the concept of mobility partnerships between the European Union, Member States and third countries could be tested by way of a limited number of pilot partnerships. The Council therefore invites the Commission to consult Member States on the further development of this concept, including, in particular, on the terms of reference, and with a view to exploratory talks with interested third countries on pilot partnerships in close cooperation with the Presidency and interested Member States. The Commission is invited to report back to the Council on the outcome of these consultations in order to enable the Council to decide by the end of 2007 whether to invite the Commission to launch pilot partnerships. The Council agrees that legal migration opportunities, including well-managed circular migration can potentially benefit all partners involved. All possibilities for a well-managed circular migration should therefore be explored in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders with a view to the adoption of Council Conclusions not later than the end of 2007.