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

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The Commission presents the third annual report on the development of a common policy on illegal immigration, smuggling and trafficking of human beings, external borders, and the return of illegal residents.

This report provides an overview of the main developments between mid2006 and the end of 2008 in key areas to curb illegal immigration, as also highlighted in the Commission's Communication on a Common Immigration Policy for Europe as well as in the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum. The Commission hereby also fulfils its obligation to report to the Council on progress made in implementing the measures announced in the July 2006 Communication on Policy priorities in the fight against illegal immigration of third-country nationals.

The data presented in this note do not support the idea that illegal immigration to the EU is increasing. In recent years, there have been fewer refusals at the border, and the level of apprehensions and removals has been stable. The overall figures for the EU, however, hide some key differences in trends in the Member States. Mediterranean Member States have generally seen increases in most of the categories for which data are available. The growing number of people arriving after dangerous maritime crossings is particularly worrying.

Some third countries are the source of large flows of illegal immigration into the EU. Morocco, Albania and Ukraine would be the three main ones, followed by Serbia, Turkey, Brazil, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Iraq. Nationals of Sub-Saharan countries do not feature prominently in the main categories but they make up most of the arrivals by sea in countries like Spain, Malta and Italy (but not in Greece where most migrants come from further east, rather than south). Concerning the return policies of the Member States, it appears that between a third and half of the return decisions are effectively carried out. Although a 1/1 ratio may be impossible to achieve, there is still room for improvement.