Third-country nationals: joint flights for removals of illegal emigrants. Initiative Italy

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The Council adopted the following conclusions on giving practical effect to the draft Council Decision on the organisation of joint flights for removals, from the territory of two or more Member States, of third-country nationals who are the subject of individual removal orders. It notes that the use of joint flights is an effective and humane way to return persons illegally resident in the territory of EU Member States to third countries, in full respect of applicable international and Community instruments. It recalls that joint flights already take place among some Member States as a means of sharing costs, making better use of resources and demonstrating common action in the fight against illegal immigration.

In addition, the Council urges:

–an increase in the use of joint flights as a means of demonstrating the commitment of the EU in relation to joint action on returns; increasing the rate of returns from the EU; and making more effective use of resources. In particular, recognising the practical difficulties of organising common removal operations, the Council encourages Member States in close geographic proximity to organise and share return flights where such collaboration would bring about economies of scale or otherwise confer mutual benefits on participants;

–those Member States currently organising joint flights or planning to organise joint removal operations to consider inviting participation of other Member States in line with the procedures set out in the above draft Council Decision. In particular, the Council encourages Member States with existing expertise in this area to share this experience with the new Member States and those with little previous experience in the area of joint return operations;

–those Member States with extensive experience of joint flights to share their knowledge and experience with other Member States through all the appropriate EU fora. In particular, where Member States have established formal guidelines and practical rules in this area, they are invited to bring them to the attention of the appropriate EU fora, in particular to upload existing documentation in the section on return of the ICONET system.

Lastly, the Council calls on the Commission:

–to develop the new ICONET system to make it available as a secure facility for Member States to communicate with each other and share information about the organisation of joint removal operations;

–to consider the possibility of Community funding for joint flights and the further development of best practices in this area; and

- to explore with Member States ways for the Border Management Agency to provide the necessary assistance for organising joint flights. The support of the Immigration Liaison Officers (ILO) network, where appropriate and in accordance with Member States' national functions for ILOs, might also be explored.

The Member States are called upon to report regularly to the Council and to the Commission on joint flights carried out by them and to share the information and experience for the benefit of all Member States.