



DECLARATION OF INTENT

The Ministers of Interior of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Libya, Malta, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tunisia and the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship met in Rome on 19th and 20th March 2017. The discussion focused on addressing the common challenges represented by the mixed migration flows from Africa to Europe across the Central Mediterranean route.

In 2016 alone, over 4,500 migrants died or went missing at sea. This is unacceptable. More than 181,000 irregular arrivals on the European shores were recorded in 2016 only from the Mediterranean Central Route. Figures for 2017 confirm this upward migratory trend. A full picture would also have to consider the number of deaths along this route, in particular in the desert, for which we have no complete and reliable statistics.

Criminal groups organising the illegal flows are the main beneficiaries of this business by exploiting migrants' search for a better life. Breaking smugglers' business model must be a priority which needs to be addressed in a joint effort and in a spirit of partnership and solidarity. These journeys represent a danger not only for migrants themselves but also for countries of origin, transit and destination.

The management of migration is a shared responsibility which calls for swift and decisive common actions to avoid thousands risking their lives to reach North Africa and Europe.

European and North African countries have always been united by strong historical, cultural and geographical ties. We have faced challenges together and we have already addressed many of them in our common history.

In view of the new global migratory trends, this partnership should be further strengthened, with a renewed proactive, comprehensive and coherent approach recognising the Mediterranean as a strategic priority. We intend to address together the situation in the Central Mediterranean, based upon historical and shared values of humanity, solidarity, hospitality, and respect for human rights.

The Mediterranean is a geo-strategic region that must tackle new global challenges, including those linked to migration, in a spirit of unity and according to a coordinated Euro-Mediterranean strategy, based on peaceful relations and shared prosperity.

After having managed to curb the flows from the Eastern Mediterranean route, while following developments in the other parts of the Mediterranean, focus is now needed to jointly work to better manage the situation in the Central Mediterranean. This requires taking effective action within the framework of a strategic response which prioritises saving lives and curtailing smuggling operations, in line with the objectives of the Malta Declaration of 3 February 2017. This approach should also consider to promote further reflection about possible actions at the southern Libyan borders with the aim to save lives in the desert.

The Ministers therefore agreed to:

- *increase regular coordination, cooperation and exchange of expertise and information in the management of mixed migration flows in the Central Mediterranean in order to:*
 - *tackle the roots causes of migration;*
 - *shape the economic dimension of migration, on the basis of the shared understanding that well managed migration can provide an important contribution to the sustainable development of the countries of origin, transit and destination by strengthening employment opportunities particularly for the young, in the countries of origin but also of transit; by investing in economic development to pre-empt new migratory flows, and by strengthening opportunities linked to remittances investments and job creation to counter the smuggling business model;*

- *further mobilise resources, in line with recent commitments, to support projects enhancing the capacities to manage migration and promoting the social, institutional and economic development in the countries of origin, including through training and education;*
- *counter the smuggling and trafficking in human beings and reduce the number of irregular crossings by sea and in the desert and achieve a stronger operational cooperation with a view to saving lives;*
- *improve the living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees as well as the systems aimed at ensuring them an effective protection;*
- *strengthen border protection through specific training programmes, information exchange and provision of means (equipment and technology) to increase the operational capabilities;*
- *increase cooperation in the field of returns, including the process of returning migrants safely back to their countries of origin;*
- *intensify information campaigns and develop joint communication especially aimed at increasing awareness of the risks related to irregular migration, including at the different points along the journeys of migrants.*

The Ministers and the Commissioner also agreed to jointly monitor the implementation of these actions including as well meetings at a Senior Official Level and to meet again when appropriate to assess the results achieved and to promote further actions. To this aim they agreed to establish a Contact Group composed by the Ministers, the High Representative/Vice President and the Commissioner.