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E-000762/2021

Answer given by Ms Johansson
on behalf of the European Commission
(29.4.2021)

Pursuing a European integrated border management and full operationalisation of the reinforced European Border and Coast Guard, including the setting up of the standing corps, is a priority of the proposed New Pact on Migration and Asylum and will contribute to strengthening the protection of the EU external borders. The Pact also provides for the strengthening of the common EU return system, and from an operational point of view, the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) in the field of return has significantly increased. The creation of a new Deputy Executive Director and dedicated Return Division to be appointed as a matter of priority will further equip the Agency to deliver on its reinforced mandate on returns.

In 2019, approximately 628 000 third country nationals were found to be irregularly present in the EU¹. In 2019, more than 140 000 non-EU nationals ordered to leave were returned². Nearly 16 000 were returned in Frontex-supported return operations, 15% more than in 2018³. In 2020, despite the very difficult situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Member States returned over 12 000 non-EU nationals with the support of the Agency, only 24% fewer than in 2019⁴.

In the proposed Pact the Commission also announced the adoption in 2021 of the new EU action plan against migrant smuggling for the period 2021-2025. The action plan will focus on combatting organised criminal networks and, in line with the EU Security Union Strategy⁵, will seek to stimulate cooperation between the EU and non-EU countries through targeted counter-smuggling partnerships aimed at supporting the work of law enforcement and judicial actors to tackle migrant smuggling.

¹ Eurostat data : https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_eipre&lang=en

² Eurostat data: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_eirtn&lang=en

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en#returns

⁴ https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/In_Brief_2020/20.0147_inbrief_2020_11th_web_fixed4.pdf

⁵ COM(2020)605.