1. Opening of the meeting and dialogue with UN High Commissioner for Refugees

The Deputy Chair of the Management Board welcomed Mr António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. ED EASO also greeted UNHCR and highlighted the positive and long lasting relationship developed between EASO and UNHCR.

Mr Guterres congratulated EASO for the good results achieved. UNHCR stressed that EASO supports making Europe a continent of asylum with a fair share and building a constructive atmosphere in a complex context where the Member States’ interests might sometimes differ. UNHCR ensured its full support to EASO and called on an increase of its capacities and resources. UNHCR stated that the global situation is characterized by increased mixed flows with people more and more on the move for a variety of reasons, which sometimes are difficult to distinguish. UNHCR underlined that, for the first time last year, the largest migratory movement was not South-North but South-South (36%), (6% North-South and 23% North-North). Forced migration constitutes a significant part of this movement: in 2013 there were more than 50 million people displaced internally and externally due to conflicts or persecution. UNHCR considered that the acceleration of the influx is dramatic: while in 2011, 14.000 people per day were forced to move due to conflicts or persecution, in 2012 and 2013, the number grew up to 23.000 and 32.000, respectively. UNHCR stated that humanitarian organizations do not have sufficient capacity to respond to this exponential growth. UNHCR considered that today power relations are unclear, impunity, unpredictability and national sovereign agendas are gaining ground on human rights agendas in many countries. Linking this global context to the migration dimension, UNHCR stressed that migration pressure is inevitable and, at the same time, part of the solution of the complexity of the European equation. UNHCR mentioned that the demographic projections estimate that the population in Africa will grow from the current 1.5 billion persons to 2.4 billion by 2050, while the EU population in the same period will decrease by 5% counting on migration and of 12% not counting on migration. Despite the positive contribution by migrants to EU Member States economies and sustainability, there is at the same time a strong reaction of the public opinion against migration and in favour of national identity. Within this framework, UNHCR underlined that the debate on asylum tends to be emotional rather than rational. UNHCR stressed the need to realise that a global labour market exists and is being developed further. Not recognition this reality may lead to irregular movements, black labour markets, smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Mr Guterres encouraged the promotion of a context in which Europe looks into migration as an inevitable effect of the global labour market and of the demographic evolution. In this context, UNHCR considered that it is extremely important to have a protection sensitive border management approach. Border guards’ training is deemed fundamental to this end in order to promote a change of attitude. Furthermore it is crucial to make asylum a true European engagement and not a multiplication of different individual engagements. Development and cooperation policies have to a certain extent enhanced migration by promoting the urbanization of countries in the South where jobs opportunities are lacking. UNHCR called for more actions in the areas of human mobility, regulation of migratory flows, creation of protection capacity in countries of transit and countries of origin and build-up of a true CEAS. Mr Guterres underlined that the CEAS is an ambitious project which is still facing challenges which affect the functionality of the system. In 2014, 68% of the asylum requests have been made in four EU countries (DE, FR, IT and SE) and, if the trend continues,
by the end of the year 50% of the requests will be made in DE and SE. UNHCR regretted that some countries are penalised because they follow the rules. Thus, a common and full assumption of responsibility by each Member State is required. The highest numbers of requests are not lodged in countries of the EU southern border due to secondary movements, which were supposed to be prevented by the CEAS. It is remarkable that the countries which perform best on asylum are the ones which are usually more open to resettlement, relocation and humanitarian protection schemes. Mr Guterres referred to a way forward according based on three pillars: responsibility according to which each Member State has to fully apply the acquis; trust, which has to be built among countries and towards the system; and solidarity, which, acknowledging different levels of capacity, should be offered if each country assumes its own responsibility. UNHCR stated that the pillar of solidarity can only be built if the pillar of responsibility is solid enough. UNHCR referred to the Central Mediterranean Sea Initiative, which offers opportunities to work together with EASO in a number of key areas, including on relocation, integration and return.

Several members (European Commission, DK, IE, NL) posed questions to UNHCR regarding potential priorities to be set by EASO, resettlement challenges, the principles of responsibility and solidarity in practice and the importance of embedding migration elements in international cooperation and development programmes.

Mr Guterres pointed to the failure of the mainstream political parties in Europe to adopt a rational approach in the debate on migration in general, including asylum. EASO can give an essential contribution in practical aspects to make the asylum system working better, focusing on quality. More facts and figures and more practical developments will help preventing the rise of the political issue in a polemic way. Mr Guterres in reply to NL explained that resettlement is a strategic tool for burden sharing that enhances dialogue with countries of first asylum; in the past UNHCR suffered of a backlog due to the increased number of resettled people, which went from 40.000 to 100.000. UNHCR is now ready to increase its referral capacity in order to match the increased generosity of Member States and to meet the target of 100.000 Syrians in two years.

Furthermore Mr Guterres addressing the European Commission’s query on how to enhance the circle that goes from responsibility to solidarity underlined the importance to build trust among Member States through informal dialogue which can support a comprehensive approach and reinsure Member States that results can be achieved jointly.

UNHCR High Commissioner agreed with DK on the importance that governmental development programs take into account irregular internal movements; cooperation with third countries is crucial to address the migration issue in the long term but currently it is challenging to identify sustainable partners in some third countries, like in Libya and Egypt. Finally, in regards to the situation in Ukraine, given the increased number of IDPs, which is usually announcing future flows of displaced people, Europe needs to be prepared for a possible influx, depending on the evolution of the political situation. Though, it is very important to not turn the movements of applicants from Ukraine (towards the EU and towards Russia) into political propaganda.

The Deputy Chair concluded that, as long as impunity and unpredictability are growing in the world, the responsibility of the EU will also grow. The Deputy Chair recalled that the international protection system in the EU is one of the most advanced in the world and it is founded on legal, cultural and human elements. Collaboration between EASO and UNHCR is crucial to make further progress on the CEAS.

2. Adoption of the draft agenda

The Deputy Chair welcomed two new alternate members: Mr Adam Kittl and Ms Lykke Sorensen appointed by Czech Republic and Denmark, respectively. The Deputy Chair also welcomed the representatives from the associated countries. Unfortunately, the members from Austria and Portugal
have not been able to attend the meeting. The Deputy Chair informed that a written notification was received from Austria and Portugal enabling Germany and Spain, respectively, to vote by proxy.

The agenda was adopted.

3. Adoption of the minutes of the 14th Management Board meeting
The minutes of the 14th Management Board meeting held on 26 May 2014 were adopted.

4. List of documents for information
The members took note of the written information provided under the list of A points.

5. Brainstorm on asylum statistics for the practical management of the CEAS
The Deputy Chair introduced the brainstorm exercise on facts and figures to enable a substantiated discussion regarding the elements of comparability and divergence to be taken into consideration when addressing the practical implementation of the CEAS.

ED EASO explained how the presentation is work in progress being part of a long term project which aims at providing a clearer picture of the reality, challenging statements which are not pinned by evidence. Starting from the assumption that all Member States are equal and different at the same time (equal e.g. because they all have one vote in the Council and one Commissioner, but different in terms of financial contribution, size, population and number of members of the European Parliament), the aim of the exercise is to define the common elements of comparability which are relevant, as many elements that reach the public debate are not relevant. As preliminary remarks it must be accepted that all data are partially wrong as they depend upon the interpretation given to their definitions; secondly, the difference in GDP should not be used as an argument not to comply with the aquis.

The ranking of EU+ countries changes drastically when adopting respectively population, area and density as contextual indicators. FR, ES and SE have the largest areas, but the highest density of population is registered in BE and NL. MT is a peculiar case with lowest area and highest density while almost 70% of the entire population of the EU+ is concentrated in only six Member States (DE, FR, IT, ES, UK and PL). Another key element is the distinction between applicants and beneficiaries of international protection: in the period 2009-2013 out of less 2 million applicants in the EU+, 550.000 were granted protection. This great difference between total number of applications and positive decisions, observable in all Member States but with different rates, is mainly due to pending cases, negative decisions, withdrawals, abscending applications and Dublin cases. The figures on withdrawal, which refer only to the period March-July 2014, are very significant: for instance, in the period of reference HU has registered a high influx, but 59% of applicants have withdrawn, meaning that the net influx in HU is only 40% of what is commonly listed in the statistics, and for PL, this situation is even more evident. On the other hand, IT has a 3% withdrawal rate, meaning that maybe, contrary to the general perception, applicants who register in IT wait for their decision in the country. The ranking of EU+ Member States based on total applicants and based on total granted protection differ: for the period 2009-2013, the top five Member States for total applications were DE, FR, SW, UK and BE while in terms of number of beneficiaries the top five were DE, UK, SE, FR, IT. From this preliminary analysis ED EASO observed that the total number of applicants is a relevant factor impacting the national asylum administration while the number of beneficiaries is significant to understand the socio-economic impact of integration. The following analysis concentrates on the composition of the caseload: all Member States differ in ten countries of origin for applicants and for beneficiaries. For instance, FR has a totally different caseload than other top Member States and Estonia doesn’t have any of the top ten countries of origin of other EU+. In DE the top country of origin is Serbia and Serbians have very high number of negative decisions. In addition, even within the same country of origin there could be different groups of applicants. Next, the figure shows the pending cases in relation to number of applicants and number of
asylum officers. To be noted that the data for EL does not include backlog previous to the establishment of the Asylum Service and that the data on resources suffer of differing interpretation of the definition of the term staff and requires further improvement. The last three elements to be taken into analysis are the year-to-year changes in the number of applicants, the number of Dublin transfers, which is strongly affecting only three Members (ES, CH, LU) and the number of resettled persons. In regard to the last, the perception that countries with low influx may compensate doing more resettlement is only true for FI and DK. As concluding remarks ED EASO observed how certain statements have been often made, such as the assumption that five Member States deal with 65% of the influx without observing that the same five States count for 55% of the population, or the argument that frontline states have the highest burden, while in reality there is only one border state (IT) among the top five Member States for number of applications and beneficiaries. Given all the elements presented, some conclusions can be drawn: it is not right to compare total caseloads because each Member State has a different caseload. Secondly, the comparison of positive decisions is more accurate than the comparison of number of applicants; and thirdly, the population size is a relevant indicator. As way forward, it will be relevant to focus the analysis of the reasons behind the applicants’ choice of destination, looking into the pull factors in the Member States and deepening the understanding of benefits’ package and the overview of different protection status in EU+. Finally, as already mentioned, the analysis of staff capacity deserves more attention.

The Deputy Chair thanked ED EASO for providing a very challenging presentation and invited members to react. The majority of members agreed with the aim of the exercise and with the importance to have reliable data, for a number of reasons: data are useful for managers to improve processes (NL), to reveal the complexity behind the perceivable facts (IT) and to inform properly the public opinion (FR); reliable and comparable statistics are a tool to build trust and solidarity among Member States (DK, FR) and to nourish a healthy political debate and policy making process (NO); finally, data can be used in connection to early warning and preparedness (UNHCR). In addition, many interventions (IE, SE, BE, FR, NL, SI) underlined the need to improve the quality of data collection, also by increasing the accuracy in providing national data to EASO, making statistics fully comparable and looking at additional elements, not only numbers. Training, quality of staff, type of contract are all elements that influence the staff resources figure; furthermore, suggestions were made to distinguish administrative cases from cases in substance, foster consistency on the count of Dublin cases (COM), include the different steps of the asylum procedure and the processing time, the budget and the proper implementation of the aquis as indicators, include data on irregular movements (EL, CH), differentiate first time applications from second time and disaggregate data by individual and families. It was widely emphasized (BE, DE, NL, NO, COM, DK, CZ) the importance to investigate further the patterns of the influx and the reasons behind the differences in EU+ countries’ caseload; it is necessary to identify and analyse the possible pull factors (e.g. diaspora, family reunification, language, package of social benefits, reception conditions, opportunity of integration, network of organized crime), even if it is challenging to understand how each factor plays a role, also thinking that the choice of applicants can be based on rumours or on perceptions. CZ encouraged EASO to look more in depth into countries of origin, possibly complementing the monthly trend analysis with regular reports on key countries of origin and HU invited to take into analysis the differences between target and transit countries. The European Commission highlighted the necessity to integrate statistics with analysis, developing dedicated studies by nationalities and by Member States and understanding better secondary movements. ES reminded that asylum is only one part of the migration process and it is influenced by other parts and aspects which are not always reflected into the statistics; for instance, in the last decade Spain issued over 2 million authorizations of residence status of non-EU while only 3% were applicants for protection. Return is also part of the process and should be better reflected (DK) and distinction should be made in returning single men or families, being the latest more difficult to enforce (UK). Specific remarks were made by UNHCR concerning the need to harmonize the way Palestinians are recorded, to include
gender marked data and data on manifestly founded or unfounded procedures. IT informed on an expected increase of resources, given that a Government decree of emergency, which foresees to increase the number of Territorial Asylum commissions (from 10 to 20, in addition to 30 sections that can be added on need), is under discussion in the Parliament and thanked EASO to support the improvement of quality. IT finally informed that up to September 2014 the applications were 39.955. DE commented that in regards to the high backlog, 300 officers were added to the staff in 2014 to reduce the accumulation of applications; however, if the trend continues, increased staff won’t be anyhow sufficient. UK made reference to the joint letter (UK, FR, ES, PL, DE) to Commissioner Malmström calling for better control of external borders and of migration movements towards the EU, enhanced fight against irregular migration networks and reinforced cooperation with the States of origin and transit affected by migration. The caseload in UK includes in the top nationalities a large number of applicants entered with a visa (PK, IR, AF) while the influxes from Eritrea and Syria are mainly characterized by irregular entrance and smuggling. Over the last ten years the number of asylum claims in the UK went down, from about 80.000 to 25.000 a year; on the other hand, and as part of the same phenomenon, there is an increased number of applications lodged by people already in the UK and based on human rights ground, mainly on the right to a family life.

ED EASO praised the high number of interventions and recalled that the main objective of the brainstorm is to use statistics to build a common picture of the very complex reality and to dispel ungrounded statements. The picture is still not complete but it is at least more correct; the next step is to zoom into the picture, looking at countries of origin and the reasons behind the different influx to Member States. The Western Balkans report goes in this direction and the phase III of GPS fits well the discussion for the second part of the year.

The Deputy Chair concluded stressing the importance of having similar exercises in the Management Board which stimulate thinking and open windows. Without a shared understanding of facts any analysis would be blurred and pointless; a common definition of burden that includes different steps is needed. The momentum should be kept to deepen the discussion and to develop correct analytical tools addressing the many relevant aspects mentioned in the discussion.

6. Situation of asylum in the EU
   a. Trends and analysis, with particular focus on the Mediterranean, Syria, Ukraine, Eritrea and Iraq

The Head of CIDA before presenting the latest asylum trends acknowledged the remarkable results in the provision of data, with 100% contribution rate, and encouraged Member States to provide data as early as possible. In August the number of applicants slightly decreased, explicable by the summer drop due to administrative reasons; the exception was DE that recorded 18.000 applications in August. Syrians continue to dominate the overall picture with an almost exponential rise and affecting seriously the caseload of a number of Member States, in particular DE and SE, but Ukrainians are also significant. Looking at the data on repeated applications only, the picture changes quite drastically with WB, IQ and RU in the top three positions. WB applications dropped in August in line with the seasonal trend, but the picture is not homogeneous in the EU+; a significant number of Kosovars (569) was registered in HU. Also the number of Eritreans dropped in August, which it could be a real or an administrative decrease. Differently from the previous months, the largest number of ER in August was registered in DE. In July a significant rise of Iraqi applicants was reported, largely depending on the number of repeated applications, while in August, for the first time, the applications steadily increased and there is no reason to foresee a change in the trend. Afghans represented the fourth most significant inflow. Concerning Ukrainians, the increase is significant and UKR entered the top classing countries of origin; from August UKR applications were registered in every EU+ country, with a changing distribution (IT registered the highest number in August). The number of Moldovan applicants is stable and it is not been significantly affected by the visa liberalization. A new set
of data, which have been collected for the period March-August 2014, was introduced showing the number of pending cases in 1st instance and disaggregating it by waiting time; to be noted that over 55% of cases in August were waiting a decision in 1st instance for more than six months, not in line with the EU aquis. The numbers of withdrawals in relation to the total applicants were also presented; this proportion is more remarkable for Member States with external land borders, particularly in HU (61%) and PL (68%), which are more affected by high number of absconding applicants. The figures on recognition showed almost 100% rate for Syrians and a steadily high recognition for Eritreans; the rate for Iraqi dropped until May then rose up, while the opposite was registered for Somalis. The low recognition for Ukrainians is mainly due to the fact that applications have been processed in Member States where claims were rejected. Finally, concerning UAMs, the top nationalities of claimed UAMs were SY, AFG and ER; between March-August almost 10,000 claims were registered and UAMs constitute over 10% of the caseload for Afghans, Somalis and Moroccans.

DE confirmed that Germany is under a big pressure, and besides the best efforts in increasing efficiency, reception and processing time are still very challenging, while the backlog remains a national and European political debate. Also SE shared its difficulties in facing the increased influx (in June 2404 applicants a week were recorded), especially in taking care of first reception and registration (70,000 people currently in the accommodation system). The backlog is reaching 40,000 and claimed UAMs increased up to 200 per week. PL shared worried for the situation in Ukraine: the high number of IDPs and the arrival of the winter period make fear a growing flow; in addition, a 111% increase of requests of legal stay of Ukrainians was registered.

UNHCR informed that 128,000 arrivals by boat were registered in 2014 in IT, EL, ES, MT. A response package for IT is under discussion with the support of a group of Member States, the European Commission, Frontex and EASO covering different areas (Dublin, registration, reception). Durable solutions, similarly to the ones adopted in MT, should also be explored. IT faces extraordinary situations that require extraordinary solutions and UNHCR is ready to support. A general observation pointed to the increase of undocumented potential asylum seekers, including people who do not cooperate and do not even apply for asylum. In this view UNHCR recalled that the Dublin Regulation foresees the possibility of detention when there is a risk that people may abscond. Thus, UNHCR argued that temporary limitations on movements may be necessary pending completion of registration and fingerprinting, and the lodging of an asylum application, in accordance with Executive Committee Conclusion No. 44 and Article 8 of the Reception Conditions Directive or under the Returns Directive for people who do not apply. Such detention should be considered part of the package and should apply as an exceptional measure not lasting longer than a few days. UNHCR invited IT to make additional efforts in the first line reception, including informing of the consequences for people who do not cooperate. UNHCR is aware the process is not simple as it is not possible to force people to fingerprint or to apply for protection, in addition to limitations in the IT legislation. Concerning the situation in Ukraine, the displaced people reached 310,000, of which 95% come from the Donetsk and Luhans districts, while the rest are from the occupied Crimea, even though those numbers are low estimation, based on the registration made by local authorities. Men fleeing from East to Central or West Ukraine do not register because they are afraid to be forced to join the army. Estimated 40,000 people have been returning to the areas taken back by the Ukrainian army, 120,000 people applied for temporary asylum or refugee status in the Russian Federation, 138,000 applied for other forms of protection, 550,000 people moved without applying for any kind of protection (the non-visa status allows staying in RU for 270 days). RU is relocating people from the western border areas to other regions. UNHCR stressed the importance that the EU invest strongly in the protection and assistance of people displaced within Ukraine, stabilizing the movement in order to prevent flows towards the EU+. UNHCR estimated that 60% of the 1100 accommodation centres are not fit for the winter and encouraged Member States to
provide support, while acknowledging the support already provided by EE, FI, DE, NO, UK, CZ, COM. The same concern on the situation in Ukraine was shared by the European Commission, which expressed worry also in relation to a possible pressure from displaced people in RU (currently 800,000) and informed about ECHO provision of support for additional 4 million euro. Concerning the situation in Syria, the figures are more depressing, counting 100,000 people per month fleeing but the positive sign is that more Member States pledged resettlement places. UNHCR published the report on Syrians in Europe. Concerning Eritrea, UNHCR will share with EASO and Member States participating in the practical workshop on Eritrea an internal assessment done in June 2014 and draw the attention on the recently published Amnesty International report on Eritrea and on a number of events relevant to enhance policy coherence: the fourth Euromed ministerial conference in November, the conference on THB organized with IOM and the European Commission at the end of October and the Ministerial meeting of the EU Horn of Africa Migration route initiative. Concerning Iraq, since January 2014 the number of displaced people reached 1.8 million; the majority are traumatized people, moving towards north Iraq and Turkey (6000 people), with potential movements also towards Europe. Therefore, UNHCR called for more political support to build the asylum systems in Serbia and WB.

A number of members (UK, IT, EL, MT) expressed perplexity in regards to the possibility to use detention, as it can be problematic in practice, especially when the subjects belong to vulnerable categories. DK advised on the possibility to use art. 3.5 of the Eurodac Regulation as legal basis for taking fingerprint by force if necessary, as gently as possible, which is a lighter measure than detention. UK argued in favour of communicating the intent of detention in timely way, which could work as deterrent.

The European Commission clarified that if third country nationals refuse to be identified, they are under the return law and it is possible to detain according to the Return directive, for a maximum duration of 18 months; it was added that funds are available for closed centres and that on 9 October an experts meeting will be organized to discuss the results of a survey launched to the EMN and to draw conclusion on best practices in fingerprinting for people who refuse to cooperate. If asylum seekers refuse to have their fingerprints taken because they want to choose where to apply, the system will turn into asylum shopping and the Dublin system will collapse. The same point was re-emphasized by UNHCR, clarifying the fact that this is not about detaining asylum seekers, but persons who do not cooperate with authorities and have not applied for asylum. UNHCR called on the obligation of MS to inform migrants how the system works, also using incentives (e.g. counselling, use of Dublin for family reunification, humanitarian clause) and pointed to the UNHCR standards for detention included in the EXCOM conclusion No. 44 of 1986. Finally, the European Commission announced the following upcoming relevant events: the “friends of the RDPP North Africa” meeting, the relocation and resettlement forum due to be held in November in Brussels and the meeting on the Khartoum process planned for Mid-October in Khartoum, which will be followed by the ministerial meeting in IT at the end of November.

b. Assessments in connection with EASO operational support in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Italy

The Deputy Chair reminded that during the last Management Board meeting the situation of asylum in Greece in connection with EASO’s operational support was discussed and the final interim assessment on Greece was shared in July. The approach used for the stocktaking report on Bulgaria presented earlier this year and the interim assessment report on Greece proved to be very useful evidence based input for policy and decision-making. The Management Board is an adequate forum to discuss the situation in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Italy and EASO’s present and future actions and welcomed an exchange of views on the possibility and ways to extend the targeted support.
ED EASO provided updates on the four on-going operations: in Bulgaria the support plan ends at the end of September and discussions on the possibility of continuing EASO support are taking place, expecting specific support to be requested by BG; the operation in Cyprus just started and will run until July 2015; the support to Greece will end in December 2014 and EL will consider EASO’s recommendation and will decide whether to continue with targeted support. In regards to the special support plan in Italy, the changeable situation obliges EASO to maintain constant flexibility. He stressed the added value of assessments which allow adjusting some measures, and reminded that the operations in Bulgaria and in Greece have already received an interim assessment while the final evaluations, including the one in Italy, are under planning. Finally, he thanked Member States for their contributions.

IT informed that the implementation of the plan is progressing and the national authorities are working with enthusiasm. Progresses have been achieved in the different measures, including the implementation of a pilot project on joint processing in the field of Dublin regulation. Approximately 90 persons have been trained in the asylum commissions, the module on interview techniques has been translated in Italian and two more modules (inclusion and evidence assessment) will be also translated. A mapping of the data collection system has been prepared with the involvement of all stakeholders, making efforts to bring coherence to the data collection process. A follow up discussion, including on early warning, will be included in the conference organized by the IT presidency on 18-19 November. Finally, activities under the measures of emergency and reception are in development. BG in its statement provided an update of the situation, informing how BG succeeded to a large extent in getting in control of the critical situation, thanks to the financial, operational and material support of the EU, EASO, UNHCR and the aid of the CZ, NL, HR and other organizations. As a result, the reception centres of the State Agency for Refugees increased from 3 to 7, more than 20,000 square metres of buildings were renovated, the accommodation capacity increased from 1230 to 6000 persons (in extreme situations can reach up to 8 000 – 8 500), 178 officers participated in EASO trainings, a COI unit was established and the access to the DublinNet system was improved. In July, a National Strategy for integration for the period 2014-2020 was adopted, but it is not financially secured. BG expressed concerns in regards to the rise of the asylum applications (1104 applications in August) and in relation to the challenges to cope with the integration of the beneficiaries of international protection, 90 % of which are reluctant to remain in BG and 5 % of them are willing to go back to their countries. BG is grateful to DE that decided not to return to BG more than 4 000 refugees and encourage other Member States to follow a similar approach until the Bulgarian integration strategy receives funding.

UNHCR welcomed BG progress in registering in timely fashion all applications but expressed concern on the medium and long-term sustainability of the system and encouraged EASO to continue its support and BG to learn from other Member States best practices in the field of integration. Concern was also shared in regards to Cyprus increased backlog, with more than 1100 pending applications, even if they are not recorded in the figure of EASO. Concerning Greece, UNHCR welcomed the reduction of the backlog and called for a further reinforcement of the reception capacity, including services provided in reception, and of the integration measures. Finally, concerning Italy, the progresses made in the areas of the special support are important but UNHCR underlined that the support plan should not only address the needs perceived by Italy but it should also protect the CEAS. The European Commission took note of BG statement and congratulated BG for the outstanding increase of the reception capacity; the key issue remains integration for which it is still possible to apply for funding through AMIF and the Structural Funds. In Cyprus the COM provided 3.1 million euro of emergency aid for contingency planning and reception; tremendous progresses have been achieved, increasing the reception capacity from 70 up to 400 places, in open accommodation up to the standard. The European Commission recommended to tackle the backlog and to use the EASO Special Support to address the issue of UAM. Regarding Greece, the European Commission informed on the preparation of a purely factual working document that summarizes the achievements and the pending
c. Joint processing in the field of asylum

The Deputy Chair informed that since the 14th Management Board meeting, when the scope and the proposals to conduct preliminary pilot projects on joint processing in the field of asylum were discussed, eight pilot projects have been launched with the general aim to bring together asylum staff from different Member States in order to exchange practices on the ground and to test which elements of the asylum procedure can be effectively performed jointly. The Deputy Chair passed the floor to the ED EASO to present the technical report on the preliminary pilot projects; the same document will be presented in SCIFA.

ED EASO underlined that the joint processing was discussed in a number of occasions, including in the SCIFA context, and the focus is very practical and experimental. Given that many of EASO activities, such as common training, COI, support measures, were already processed jointly, joint processing itself is not revolutionary. Currently, EASO has developed a practical and bottom-up approach to identify, within the existing EU aquis, possible steps of the asylum process to test the pilot projects. So far eight projects have been developed in key areas, including Dublin, UAMs, COI, Registration; the reaction has been very positive, with twelve Member States participating. The joint processing is a significant trust-building measure and, as the pilots have proven, it is feasible within the existing EU aquis. The main obstacles, which are not constraints in principle but mainly practicalities, derive from national laws and from the organization of national administrations. As a way forward, three comprehensive pilot projects will be launched looking at the whole processes within the application, the screening of vulnerability and the asylum determination phases (excluding the decision phase). While the first pilots were made in an abstract form, the next step will be to use real cases.

DE, AT, BE shared positive feedback concerning their experiences in the pilot projects and supported the further development of joint processing. The use of a common language was considered a great advantage.
and it should be considered for the future. Organizational expenditure can be challenging and the analysis of the results of the pilots should be used to better understand and use good practices in joint processing. The Deputy Chair welcomed the enthusiastic reaction of members who are invited to express their interest for the three comprehensive pilot projects on joint processing. Even though bilateral contacts will be established by EASO, no one will be excluded.

7. AOB
The provisional dates for the meetings of the Management Board in 2015 were discussed and they will be subject to revision and approval in the following meeting, including a discussion on the form of the meetings. In this regard IE, FR and DE shared some concern in regard to the long gap till the first meeting of the Management Board and proposed to have brainstorm sessions on strategic issues more regularly. ED EASO clarified the formal number of Management Board meetings is between three and four and flexibility applies based on needs and also thanks to the possibility to use the written procedure.

ED EASO, in regards to the adopted Work Programme 2015, clarified that a revision will be made necessary in order to align the staff and budget to the figures which will be later approved by the financial authority. He remarked that, besides UNHCR and Member States’ encouragement to increase EASO’s resources, the European Commission has reduced the budget allocation compared to the initial proposal. Last week the LIBE committee voted an opinion to increase EASO’s budget and staff; the different steps of the co-decision procedure will follow.

ED EASO informed about the draft working arrangement between EASO and eu-LISA; finally, he provided an update on the external evaluation. The contract with the service provider has been signed, the evaluators will be working for the next approximately eight months and inputs will be sought also by Member States; as foreseen in the EASO Regulation, modifications to the founding regulation maybe derive from proposals addressed in the evaluation recommendations.

8. Conclusion by the chair
The Deputy Chair concluded stressing the significance of the discussion held during the meeting, with Mr Guterres excellent intervention, with a stimulating brainstorm, the updates on EASO’s operations and the endorsement of EASO and eu-LISA working arrangement.