



Press Release

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Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos visits EASO

European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos visited the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) today to discuss the work of EASO in enhancing the implementation of the Common European Asylum System, and to discuss the findings of two EASO actions conducted within the framework of the Task Force Mediterranean: the pilot project on information gathering in Malta and Italy on the phenomenon of facilitation of irregular migrants and the EASO pilot projects on joint processing activities in the field of asylum. Moreover, EASO's Executive Director gave the Commissioner an update on the latest asylum trends in the European Union.

During the visit, the Commissioner met with EASO's Executive Director, Dr Robert K. Visser and EASO staff, to discuss EASO's work and activities, including two EASO actions conducted within the framework of the **Task Force Mediterranean**: the pilot project on information gathering in Malta and Italy on the phenomenon of facilitation of irregular migrants and the EASO pilot project on joint processing activities in the field of asylum.

Concerning the **phenomenon of facilitation of irregular migrants**, together with Frontex, Europol and Eurojust, EASO conducted a pilot project in Malta and Italy aimed at extracting aggregate and anonymous data from the information provided by asylum seekers about the routes taken and the conditions they experienced on their way to Europe. The information collected through the method applied in pilot project **added new knowledge to the phenomenon of facilitation and the working methods used by facilitators**. The pilot project **helped to create a systematic data collection system that can be used for long-term strategic analysis**. As a next step, EASO proposes to conduct another pilot project in two Member States that are not at the EU external border to learn more about facilitation of secondary movements.

Moreover, EASO conducted a number of **joint processing pilots** with the involvement of 20 European States. EASO took a practical, gradual and bottom up approach focused on specific steps of the asylum process where support by Member States' and EASO experts could provide added value to the host Member State. EASO conducted a set of preliminary pilots and a second generation of more complex joint processing pilots, focusing on asylum applications, asylum determination and vulnerability assessment. These pilot projects demonstrated **that there are various aspects of the asylum procedure that can be done jointly and that many technical aspects contain similar elements**. Through the experience of these pilot projects, many asylum officials from different Member States **experienced a new level of trust when they got access to other Member State's actual cases, conducted interviews, assessed asylum claims and drafted internal decisions jointly**. These projects also helped in creating an atmosphere of solidarity on a very practical level. **The pilot projects also showed that Member states can share resources when extra capacity is necessary**.

Additionally, the EASO Executive Director gave an update on the latest asylum trends in the European Union. In particular, it was noted that in recent months the total number of applicants recorded by EU+ countries¹ has remained around 70,000 applicants per month. In contrast with previous years, there was no seasonal decline observed towards the end of 2014. According to the EASO's Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS) data collection, in 2014, more than 650,000 applicants for international protection were registered in the EU+ (a 40% increase compared to 2013 when around 465,000 were recorded). There has been a substantial increase in the number of Kosovar applicants registered since November 2014 through the first weeks of 2015 – arriving principally in Hungary and applying there, and in EU+ countries such as Germany, Austria and France. In February 2015, the Western Balkan countries, Syria and Afghanistan made up the top three countries of origin of applicants registered in the EU+.

Commissioner Avramopoulos held that *'since its launch, the EU Asylum Support Office has established itself as a key actor of European solidarity, fostering greater cooperation with and between Member States and other EU agencies.'*

Dr Visser stated *'I am honoured to welcome Commissioner Avramopoulos at EASO. My agency is fully committed to support Member States and the Commission in the implementation of the Common European Asylum System. It is only by working closely together with Member States and the Commission that we achieve a truly Common Asylum Policy based on solidarity, responsibility sharing and mutual trust'*.

Watch the press conference on:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm?page=1&date=03/26/2015&institution=0#s291129>

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office by contacting Mr Jean-Pierre Schembri on the following e-mail address: jean-pierre.schembri@easo.europa.eu

¹ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland