

Opening Speech
by
EU Commissioner Avramopoulos

8th Global Forum on Migration and Development in Istanbul
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This very important conference takes place here in Istanbul under the shadow of the tragic events in Ankara.

I wish to express in the name of the European Union, in the name of the citizens of Europe our deep sorrow for the loss of lives of innocent victims and our solidarity to their families and to Turkey.

Europe stands by Turkey, in our common struggle against those who have declared a barbarian war, a war of hatred against freedom, democracy and human values.

Turkey in its fight against terrorism is not alone.

The free and democratic world is standing by, solidarity will evolve.

We have to unite and coordinate our forces in order to defend our values and our citizens and stay determined and firm.

The terrorism at the end will not prevail. Freedom of democracy will win.

Today is the right moment for the Global Forum on Migration and Development to come together.

More than 60 million people today are forcibly displaced.

This is about the population size of a country like France or the United Kingdom.

Some of these people have fled war or terror recently; others have been born into displacement and know no other life than that of a being refugee.

The events of the past few years and notably of this summer show us that we are dealing with a refugee crisis of an unprecedented scale.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a global crisis and we all have the same challenges: from trying to save lives and offer protection, fighting migrant smugglers, to addressing irregular migration and root causes.

I am here in the country which is hosting more than 2 million Syrian refugees— and we have to be recognisant of the enormous humanitarian effort that the Turkish authorities are managing. At the same time, while the Syrian conflict is the most pressing issue as we speak, we cannot forget the other large refugee populations currently residing in other host nations such as Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya and Ethiopia – to name but a few.

We all try to address refugee crises as precisely that: "crises", hoping that they are temporary and transient.

But reality teaches us that we need to think and act much more holistically and much more long-term.

That is precisely what the European Commission is trying to do, and what has been its political priority from the very outset.

In May we presented a European Agenda on Migration which seeks to address today's challenges both now and in the long term, both within and outside the European Union.

Some examples: we have enhanced our search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, we have proposed to resettle 20,000 and relocate 160,000 people in need of protection, and we have launched an EU Action Plan on Migrant Smuggling as well as an Action Plan on Return.

Let me emphasise that for the first time in the history of European migration policy we will be relocating 160,000 people in need of international protection in the next two years.

Member States have supported our proposals on this and it is unprecedented. This is testimony to our collective European effort – but we are not there yet.

Three weeks ago, the Commission has proposed to increase our financial resources to address the refugee crisis by €1.7 billion for 2015 and 2016.

This means for example increasing humanitarian aid by €500 million, which can go to the UNHCR and the World Food Programme to help Syrian refugees directly in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, as well as in Syria itself.

We now expect Member States to match our increased funding proposals.

As we speak, the Commission is adopting a report on the state of play of all the priority actions that we have proposed to address the refugee crisis, which will directly be presented to the heads of states and governments at the European Council tomorrow.

This is our message and encouragement to the other European Union Member States: to follow through on their commitments, now.

But Europe's response is part of a wider global response.

That is why being here today with you is important.

Because it shows the efforts of other regions in the world, the existing challenges, and the long road ahead of us.

It is also encouraging, because we are here as allies, to cooperate even more and join forces.

Such cooperation should be multidimensional: we need more financial support, but we also need structural long-term solutions – both for the nations that are disrupted by instability, the countries of transit and destination, and for the vulnerable people that are seeking refuge.

That is why I welcome the UN's overall appeal for more resettlement places globally, as expressed by my colleagues Antonio Guterres and Peter Sutherland.

EU Member States have promised to resettle more than 22,000 places this year, and we want to go beyond that next year through a structural EU resettlement scheme.

At the same time, important global partners such as the US, Canada and Australia have also offered to resettle tens of thousands of refugees in the coming years.

Yes we need to do more, but I am optimistic that a shift of mind set is happening among many global actors today.

But the refugee crisis cannot be addressed by refugee policies alone.

I am preaching for the converted here if I say that migration and refugee priorities have to be mainstreamed in many of our policy areas: trade, development, employment – to name but a few. I am therefore pleased to see that migration and mobility are included in the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Refugees do not only need rescuing, they also need opportunities for empowering and developing. We should not forget that millions of migrants worldwide make significant and essential contributions to the economic, social and cultural development of their host countries as well as their communities back home.

Let me conclude even though we cannot really have conclusions as our work is not finished.

Today is another important day both here and in Europe where we move ahead on addressing what is one of the greatest challenges of our times.

It is a challenge that will be with us for some time to come, but which I am convinced that we will be able to address jointly – because it is the only way ahead.

Thank you.