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## **Open letter to the European Council**

### **The European response to the current migration challenges**

*Brussels, 19 June 2017*

**To: Mr Donald Tusk, President of the European Council**

**Cc. EU Heads of States and Governments**

Dear President Tusk,

Now more than ever, the EU needs a successful and sustainable strategy on migration and asylum, based on the Member States' clear pledge to pursue the principle of common European responsibility and solidarity, paying a particular attention also to the drama of unaccompanied minors. It is a paradox that, for the past two years, we have been referring to the migratory state of affairs in terms of emergency, while not transforming into reality the assumed commitments in terms of policy actions at EU level. In the face of this sense of urgency, as European Progressives, we are strongly concerned about the ongoing debate, at formal and informal level, within the EU Council on the European response to the current migration challenges. From the outset, our political groups have persistently sought to pursue solidarity, both within the European Union and internationally.

While the European Parliament is currently advancing across the political groups on defining its position regarding the revision of the Dublin regulation, we are witnessing with great concern the inadequate advancements from the Council's side on this matter.

In this respect, we are calling for achieving a significant progress also at Council level, with respect to the Dublin revision, the relocation and the legal migration - related matters, in order to equally reflect the current state of play within the European Parliament.

As already highlighted, we are deeply unsettled about the ongoing debate within the EU Council on the revision of the Dublin regulation, which is insufficient and departs radically from the European Parliament's position, as expressed clearly in the Kyenge - Metsola Report and the concrete and binding notion of solidarity anchored in EU's primary law, in asking to overcome the first country of irregular entry criterion and to move towards a centralized and permanent mechanism of fair responsibility sharing among Member States. We would like to take this opportunity to recall not only the pressing need to deliver such a significant file in good time, but also the necessity to develop an asylum system based on true solidarity and responsibility sharing, in compliance with art. 78 and art. 80 of the TFEU.

Moreover, in 2015, a decision to relocate 160 000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece was adopted as an urgent solidarity measure in the absence of a European asylum system based on responsibility-sharing, which is still not in place. Two years later, while acknowledging that some progress has been made, we remain deeply disappointed regarding the unfulfilled commitments of Member States to solidarity and responsibility sharing, which is also in detriment to the rights and living conditions of the refugees themselves. We are appealing to the collective responsibility with respect to the fulfilment of obligations under the Council decisions and to systematically relocate asylum seekers, from Greece and Italy, until the committed 160.000 relocations have been taken place in an effective and smooth manner and to extend the relocation measures until the adoption of the reform of the Dublin regulation, as the Parliament called for in its resolution of 18 May 2017.

We need harmonised, efficient and ambitious, safe and legal channels of migration, which are effectively used by and across the Member States. One of these channels should pass through the establishment of an EU Blue Card, which should be available to a broad class of highly-skilled third country nationals, irrespective of their legal status, in particular, to any beneficiaries of international protection, or applicants for international protection who already have access to the labour market and fulfil all the qualifying criteria for a Blue Card.

Moreover, we need to seek the extension of the framework for legal migration, so as to reflect the positive and concrete contribution that migrants make to the European economy and effectively combat smuggling, including harmonized legal frameworks for stable and temporary migration for all workers' categories, as well as granting humanitarian visas and an ambitious EU resettlement framework that will ensure safe transfer of refugees to Europe.

Regarding the external dimension of the current refugee and migration challenges, we remain seriously concerned about the current security-driven approach -which seems to be mainly focused on "outsourcing" border management, stemming the flows and increasing returns. Apart from providing an adequate response from a humanitarian perspective, particularly with regard to the shameful number of deaths in the Mediterranean where immediate, proactive, mass search and rescue activities shall be put in place, we need to focus on the long-term objectives, such as tackling the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, through a reinforced and consistent EU development policy, fully aligned to the SDG and the Agenda 2030 and with no conditionality on the third country's willingness to cooperate on migration management.

We hope we can count on you, as our strong ally, in order to fight for these proposals and to promote sustainable common European solutions based on solidarity, equal and fair responsibility sharing and full respect of human rights. Every effort, if equally shared, is sustainable for everyone. This is why, we need to face together another major European challenge, on which the future of our Union is at stake.

Yours sincerely,



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Chair S&D Group



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