

Brussels, 15 March 2026

Dear colleagues,

The current **geopolitical situation**, particularly in the Middle East, brings increasing risks of protracted conflict with direct and indirect repercussions for the Union. In the weeks and months to come, we will need to maintain a high level of vigilance and ensure the necessary level of preparedness for any future challenges.

The **conflict in the Middle East** presents challenges that demand the mobilisation of political, diplomatic and operational tools. It has already led to the internal displacement millions of people, notably in Iran and Lebanon. While reaffirming our steadfast commitment to de-escalation, safeguarding regional security and stability, we must stand in solidarity with our partners in the region. Although for now, the conflict has not translated into immediate migratory flows towards the EU, what the future holds remains unclear and necessitates the full mobilisation of every migration diplomacy tool we have at our disposal. It is therefore imperative that we work with countries in the region, such as Türkiye, Lebanon and Pakistan. Over the past days, I have myself spoken to all leaders in the region, and members of the College are in regular contact with their counterparts.

We will ensure continued **increased situational awareness**. Commission services are monitoring developments through the Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint Network, in close cooperation with Member States, EU Agencies, as well as IOM and UNHCR. The EU must stand ready to support affected countries and respond quickly to the emerging needs on the ground.

The situation in Iran is further complicated by the presence of around 4 million **Afghans**, who are in a precarious situation and vulnerable to onward displacement. Our humanitarian support for basic needs of Afghan nationals and host communities in Iran continues through international nongovernmental organisations and the UN. We are also monitoring the ongoing tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which risks compounding an already fragile context. Our cooperation with Iraq, Pakistan, Armenia and Azerbaijan, all of which are affected by the crisis, will also be essential. We will continue to engage with the authorities in countering migrant smuggling, including through via thorough airport controls, and cooperation on readmission.

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*Along the border between Iran and **Türkiye** the situation remains relatively stable due to the increased border control measures implemented by the Turkish authorities. Since 2021, the EU has allocated more than EUR 1.1 billion in support to Türkiye in the areas of migration and border management, including EUR 305 million for the protection and voluntary return of Syrian refugees, as well as EUR 431 million for the strengthening of the eastern and south-eastern borders. The implementation of these projects is ongoing, and their timely completion will contribute to Türkiye's ability to respond to emerging challenges.*

*Like many of you, I am deeply concerned by the ongoing escalation in **Lebanon** and the severe impact that Israel's military operation is having on civilians, triggering large-scale displacement. Last week I expressed the EU's solidarity with President Aoun, reiterating our commitment to supporting affected populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities. Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected. I welcome the government's decision to ban all Hezbollah military activities. It is urgent that all hostilities are brought to an end, including through renewed dialogue between Israel and Lebanon.*

*Together with international partners we need to step up our response to the growing humanitarian needs. This year, we will support Lebanon with **EUR 100 million in humanitarian assistance**. We have organised a humanitarian flight with UNICEF carrying over 40 tonnes of supplies and others are currently being organised. We are providing substantial support for basic services through an EUR 80 million package launched in December 2025, and we are now re-focusing the programming on the most urgent priorities, including support through cash assistance for vulnerable households, healthcare and education. In December, we signed a Financing Agreement with Lebanon, including EUR 25 million support to land and sea border security to be implemented with Member States.*

*The repercussions of the ongoing conflict are also being felt in **Syria**. It is important for the EU to engage with the Syrian authorities constructively in the stabilisation, recovery and reconstruction of the country. As announced during my visit with President Costa to Syria in January, the Commission is proposing to lift the partial suspension of the Cooperation Agreement with Syria. We are also focused on implementing a EUR 620 million-package in support of Syria in 2026-2027. In this regard, we work with the authorities and UNHCR to ensure that conditions are conducive to safe, dignified and sustainable returns to Syria, and we are supporting the authorities to strengthen their administrative capacities to handle return processes. We also adopted a EUR 30 million Special Measure to support **Iraq** in mitigating and managing illegal migration, by strengthening border management systems and improving access to education for vulnerable communities, including returnees and internally displaced people.*

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*We are closely monitoring any potential impact of the current situation on our partners, particularly the **Western Balkans**. We stand ready to provide contingency support to strengthen their capacities and align with EU standards. The joint strategy for contingency planning by the EU Asylum Agency and Frontex is supporting Western Balkan partners to manage migratory flows and tackle migration pressures more effectively. The implementation of the EU Action Plan for the Western Balkans has contributed to strengthening the resilience and capacity of our partners. As a result, illegal border crossings along the Western Balkans decreased by 31% in 2023 compared to 2022, by 78% in 2024 compared to 2023, and by a further 41% in 2025 compared to 2024, with this trend continuing in the first two months of 2026. As we look forward, our cooperation with the Western Balkan partners on border and migration management will continue to be essential.*

*Comprehensive and mutually beneficial **partnerships** ensure effective and rights-based cooperation on migration, using incentives across sectors and policy areas, such as visa policy, trade and financial support. Besides other areas of mutual interest, they also integrate migration in a comprehensive way, from border management and return to resettlement and other legal pathways to protection and labour mobility. Our partnerships are not only valuable for enhancing migration management but are also essential for cooperation on areas of shared interest.*

*Work is ongoing, with Member States and the southern Mediterranean partner countries, to develop the first iteration of the action plan of the **Pact for the Mediterranean** to be presented in April. This will bring forward approximately twenty initiatives of mutual interest, with substantial actions across all pillars of the Pact from economic development and investment to migration, security and preparedness.*

*In 2025, **illegal border crossings fell by 25%**, and the number of persons detected trying to cross the border illegally (178 000) was at a **five-year low**. A decline in arrivals was recorded along most routes in 2025: **-25%** on the **Eastern Mediterranean route**, **-41%** along the **Western Balkans**, **-35%** on the **Eastern border** and **-62%** along the **Atlantic route** to the Canary Islands, while the **Central Mediterranean route** remained stable. So far this year, the number of illegal border crossings continued to decrease.*

*But this is not a given. Worrying developments along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes are being recorded, with departures from **Libya** increasing sharply. Libya is the top country of departure, with almost half of all arrivals to the EU in 2025, and 88% of arrivals via the Central Mediterranean route. Along the Eastern Mediterranean route, crossings from Libya, particularly to Crete and Gavdos in Greece, have more than tripled. Our political and technical-level engagement with Libya remains crucial. In that regard, we provide financial and operational support to strengthen border management, as well as capacities for search and rescue, and the fight against migrant smuggling. We are also working with the authorities and IOM to support voluntary returns from Libya to countries of origin.*

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*We are committed to deepening our comprehensive cooperation with **Egypt**. We are progressing on the commitments taken in the joint statement that followed the EU-Egypt Leaders' Summit in October last year. Work is ongoing to implement the EUR 200 million for the operationalisation of the migration and mobility pillar under the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, including through support by Egypt to address challenges along migratory routes. The implementation of the working arrangements with Europol and Eurojust is also ongoing.*

*At the **EU-Jordan Summit** in January in Amman, we reaffirmed our commitment to advance with the implementation of our Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership. The EU and Jordan also agreed to continue working with the Syrian authorities and UN partners to provide support to displaced persons and returnees in Syria. As regards migration, protection and support to refugees, we are implementing a special measure of EUR 80 million to provide social assistance and services to Syrian refugees including voluntary returns and to contribute to sustainable skills development. We also recently signed a EUR 25 million project to support Jordan's integrated border management and internal security. Further support and investment in Jordans' economy will be leveraged in the EU-Jordan Investment Forum planned for April.*

*EU support to **Tunisia** continues to focus on the various aspects of migration, including border management, the fight against migrant smuggling, protection, legal migration, assisted voluntary returns and sustainable reintegration. Three more search and rescue vessels are expected to be delivered to the Tunisian coastguard this spring. In 2025, IOM facilitated the **voluntary return** of 8 853 migrants from Tunisia to their countries of origin. Assisted voluntary returns from North African countries to countries of origin have also intensified significantly through EU-funded operations, with over 35 800 returns in 2025.*

***Morocco** remains a key player to combat migrant smuggling. In December 2025, a new project was started to support Moroccan authorities in the fight against migrant smuggling and the protection of victims of human trafficking. In addition to ongoing and new financial support, a Talent Partnership with Morocco is being implemented to promote mutually beneficial labour mobility. We are also discussing the future Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership.*

*Cooperation continues with partner countries along the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes, where high-level political engagement could further upgrade our partnerships. With **Senegal**, we are developing a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership that would support cooperation on economic development, security and defence, as well as migration and mobility. This dialogue has already produced tangible results in reducing illegal migration and it should contribute to better cooperation on returns and readmission.*

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Mauritania is playing an increasingly important role in structured cooperation on migration management, including the prevention of irregular departures, strengthened border management, enhancing protection, and the development of legal mobility pathways. The implementation of the EUR 210 million package has progressed well and can be further upgraded over time. Going forward, we can consolidate our partnership with Mauritania through high level political dialogue and triangular cooperation with Mediterranean partners.

Migratory pressure has been on the rise in the **English Channel**, requiring a structured response. The Commission, in close collaboration with relevant Member States, will develop an EU Action Plan for the Channel Route by June with measures focused on strengthening management of the external borders, fostering return, acting against organised crime, and maximising the support of EU agencies.

The sound **implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum** is an essential condition for a sustainable EU migration policy. With the Pact starting to apply as of 12 June 2026, it is time to address remaining gaps and continue pursuing implementation steps. The Commission is in continuous dialogue with national authorities and will soon present the third state of play of the implementation of the Pact. We are at the stage where Member States need to advance on national reforms and prioritise setting up new procedures and infrastructure needed for the Pact to function. A significant step was already taken with the adoption of the Council implementing decision establishing the Solidarity Pool, which is now being operationalised. The Commission has concluded the strategic programming of an additional EUR 3 billion for Member States to support the implementation of the Pact.

Exchanges on **innovative ways** to counter illegal migration continue. Our partnerships and the implementation of a whole-of-route approach, together with IOM, UNHCR and other relevant organisations, is helping third countries to build resilient and humane migration and asylum frameworks, including by providing protection closer to countries of origin. On the EU side, important legislative steps have been taken, with the adoption of new rules on **safe third countries** and of the first EU list of **safe countries of origin**.

Improving **return** from the EU and readmission cooperation with third countries continues to be a key priority. The Commission is ready to support negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council on the Return Regulation. Agreement should be reached as soon as possible, to make the EU's overall return system more effective, with swifter and simpler procedures, and increase the return of third-country nationals with no right to stay in the EU.

To help prevent dangerous journeys and shield people from abuse, we must further step up the global **fight against migrant smuggling**, including through the reinforced Global Alliance, new tools to track digital and illicit financial activities, and a new sanctions regime.

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*Following the second conference of the **Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling** in December 2025, we continue to put forward concrete initiatives and facilitate strengthened cooperation. Since the conference, the number of partners endorsing the Joint Declaration has increased, reaching 61 worldwide. The Commission will continue working with partner countries to expand political endorsement further.*

*Boosting the Union's capacity to attract talent can help strengthen its competitiveness. The Commission presented and started the implementation of the **EU Visa Strategy** accompanied by a recommendation to make the EU more attractive for students, researchers and skilled workers. On 18 February, we launched the first-ever European Legal Gateway Office in India, opening new pathways for researchers, students and professionals to the EU and enabling European companies to tap into a larger pool of talent. This is part of a broader Memorandum of Understanding the EU signed with India in January this year. Building on this example, the Commission will work on replicating European Legal Gateway Offices in other key partners.*

*We must continue to strengthen the European Union's role on both the global and the regional stage. Our strength rests in our unity as no country can tackle migration challenges alone. It is therefore important to continue coordinating our initiatives with the **Council of Europe**, to address challenges posed by smuggling and illegal migration. The Commission is also contributing to the ongoing reflection on the application of the European Convention of Human Rights, fully taking into account both the objectives of protecting rights and ensuring security. Furthermore, the forthcoming **International Migration Review Forum** will be a good occasion to pursue a balanced approach that reduces illegal migration, prevents people from putting their lives at risk, contributes to dismantling smuggling networks, addresses root causes of migration, and provides protection close to the place of origin while further considering legal pathways.*

Our long-term strategy has migration diplomacy at its core. It needs to be supported by our aligned engagement, funding, and operational cooperation. While we work together to reduce illegal migration, we can increase our efforts in attracting talent for growth. This will strengthen our international standing.

The Annex to this letter provides a detailed overview of ongoing actions.

Looking forward to our discussion this week.

Yours sincerely,



Ursula von der Leyen