

## **Informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs ministers**

### **Ministers of Interior agree on more robust approach to migration pressure**

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At today's informal meeting in Tallinn, the EU Ministers of Interior discussed matters concerning migration and the cross-usage of databases, with Estonia raising cooperation between the European Union and Ukraine as a new topic.

The most urgent topic of the meeting was the number of migrants that has sharply increased in Italy this year. This year Italian ports have received one-fifth more migrants across the Central Mediterranean than in the same period last year. The Ministers of Interior from all Member States reiterated earlier conclusions that urgent action must be taken and the coordination of activities has to be improved in order to resolve the situation and support the frontline countries.

The Estonian Minister of Interior, Andres Anvelt, who chaired the meeting, emphasised that Europe has helped and must help those who need protection, but now the migration flows have exceeded these frames. "Of course, we have to help Italy overcome this crisis and all countries have to make efforts to that end. We have to establish a very clear return policy and deal with the reasons for the migration crisis at their source, that is, in the countries of the refugees' origin," said Anvelt.

Estonia also reaffirmed that during its Presidency it will continue reform discussions on asylum policy and that the most important thing is to think about the future and find sustainable solutions, which will work both today and in ten years. Minister Anvelt admitted that many serious discussions still need to be held on the matter.

As return is one of the key issues in the prevention and alleviation of migration pressure, the Ministers of the Interior focused on the internal dimension of the return policy for the EU, that is, what has to be done within the European Union. The common understanding is that the time between receiving a negative reply to an asylum application and the expulsion of the applicant must be reduced.

One of the main issues for the Estonian Presidency is the cross usage of European Union databases, as the need for the swift movement of fresh information runs through all topics. Therefore, the Ministers of the Interior together with the Ministers of Justice, for example, discussed options for the better use of the criminal records database and how to apply technical improvements more quickly for efficient data protection.





Andres Anvelt mentioned that swift data exchange between tens of databases within the European Union is crucial for the protection of both the Community's external border and internal security. "The European Union must go back to its roots but in a manner appropriate for 21st century," said Minister Anvelt.

Cross-border cross-usage of databases should already be enforced in the European Union by 2020 and that is why it is a target for Estonia to close this issue by the end of its Presidency. As the security of the European Union also depends on the situation of its neighbours, Estonia raised cooperation with Ukraine as a new topic in regard to the fight against organised crime and smuggling firearms at a time when the conflict still boils in Eastern Ukraine. The European Union already has a sad experience with the Western Balkan region, where it suffered from the consequences of the conflict in the form of weapons smuggling for years after the conflict itself had ended. The Ministers of Interior therefore decided that this discussion must be taken forward in order to prevent such consequences instead of having to deal with them later.

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