



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement on Unaccompanied Migrant Children

The European Union and its Member States would like to respond to comments made by the Russian Delegation during the last Permanent Council. We recall that the same issue was raised in February by Russia, to which the European Union also provided a response. We welcome constructive and good-faith dialogue of issues of common concern.

The fate of unaccompanied children during and after their journeys through the Middle-East, North-Africa and Europe remains a matter of great concern. Children are vulnerable to exploitation by criminal networks involved in human smuggling and trafficking, and this risk has been exacerbated in the context of the current situation.

The protection and promotion of the rights of the child is a priority for the EU. The welfare and specific needs of unaccompanied children need to be taken into account, including when they seek asylum in the EU, in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child. This covers, among others, appropriate reception conditions, for example placement with adult relatives, foster families or appropriate accommodation centres.

More than a billion euros have been earmarked under EU funding programmes to target the protection of children in migration and more have been earmarked by EU Member States to improve their reception capacities. Measures supported include capacity building in child protection systems for children in migration access to education, child-friendly spaces, projects to promote early identification and prevention of trafficking of children, and emergency support measures.

The fight against human trafficking is one of the European Union's priority actions in this field. Determined efforts are undertaken by EU Member States, European

institutions and agencies to ensure that from the first stage in the hotspots, actual or potential victims of human trafficking are identified, made aware of their rights, and that necessary cooperation takes place with the police and judicial authorities in order to ensure that traffickers are identified and prosecuted. Europol together with Eurojust are active in helping dismantle networks involved in the smuggling and trafficking of children.

The Commission's final report on the Action Plan on Unaccompanied minors will be published this summer. This report will benchmark progress made to date and feed into the development of a comprehensive approach for the protection of all children in migration. One of the aims of the comprehensive approach is to ensure that child protection authorities are involved in asylum and migration processes so that the necessary focus is placed on the protection of children.

The European Union has paid particular attention to the issue of unaccompanied children, also in connection with their going missing and the extra risk they face. Extensive action is already underway in order both to prevent children from going missing and to improve the reporting. Several useful actions and tools have been identified or adopted, and we will be working intensively over the next months to draw them together. Regarding prevention, we are working to provide child-friendly information about the asylum and relocation procedures in order to build the trust of the unaccompanied children and, thus, prevent them from leaving. Furthermore in order to improve cross-border cooperation and the reporting of disappearances, we are working to register children's personal data as soon as they are 6 years old, and to ensure the more consistent use of missing child alerts as well as a more consistent use of missing child hotlines.

It is important to recall that fortunately, not all unaccompanied children who disappear end up in the hands of traffickers. Many have moved on their own to apply for asylum in another country and many hope to reunite with their family members once they have settled. We will continue to ensure due focus on unaccompanied children and their protection.

The large migration and refugee flows we are facing is a global phenomenon that calls for cooperation of all and not only those directly affected. We reiterate our regret that there was no consensus at the OSCE Ministerial Meeting in Belgrade on a draft

decision on the refugee and migration crisis, including on fighting against impunity of traffickers in human beings. We will welcome all sincere efforts of OSCE participating States, partners and relevant executive structures, to contribute to the management of this crisis, with full respect for human rights and international obligations.