

**Address by the Minister of Interior Mr Konstantinos Ioannou at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the  
Monitoring Committees of the 2021-2027 Home Affairs Funds**

*Thursday, 30 November 2023, 9:30 a.m., Radisson Blu Hotel (Skala Conference Room)*

Honourable Ms Beate,

Dear Representatives of the European Commission, the European Asylum Organisation  
and the International Organisation for Migration,

Dear President, members and observers of the Home Affairs Funds Monitoring  
Committees,

Dear representatives of public bodies and Municipalities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to attend the business of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Home Affairs Funds  
Monitoring Committees of the 2021-2027 Programming Period. The Monitoring  
Committees are an instrument with a crucial role for the monitoring of the  
implementation of the Funds Programmes and the achievement of each one's objectives,  
as well as the exchange of views on the matters of migration and internal security.

Cyprus is among the frontline EU Member States and throughout the years the country  
has received great migratory pressure. At present, 5.4% of Cyprus population are either  
applicants for or beneficiaries of international protection. Political tension and conflict  
currently ongoing in the region is expected to put pressure on European countries with  
increased migration flows. In order to manage such a development in the best possible  
manner, it is required to be properly prepared in a timely manner at a national and  
European level.

It is undeniable that the challenges created by migration must be dealt with collectively  
by the European countries, on the basis of joint responsibility and solidarity which emerge  
from our capacity as EU Member States. Within this context, it is imperative to  
immediately implement the measures included in the new EU Action Plan for the Eastern

Mediterranean. The adoption of a need assessment system on a European level to promote legal migration and the processes to grant migration visas in a targeted manner are among the measures which must be immediately implemented, so as to limit illegal migration.

Dear all,

During the 2014-2020 Programming Period, within the context of the Home Affairs Funds National Programmes, projects of a total funding of €116.7 million have been implemented with European and national resources (€106.8 million from EU resources and €9.9 million from national resources). Moreover, additional funds have been obtained directly from the European Commission to manage migration, which leads to the total cost of the projects of €126.9 million from EU and national resources in the 2014-2020 Programming Period.

In the 2021-2027 Programming Period, the European Commission approved the increased allocation of funds to Cyprus, within the context of the Home Affairs Funds Programmes, of a value of €162 million. This amount includes €134 million from European resources and €28 million from national resources.

Furthermore, by recognising the disproportionate burden of migration flows on Cyprus as a frontline Member State, the European Commission approved directly additional funds, such as:

- a total of €75.2 million from European Union resources (€67.7 million) and national resources (€7.5 million), dedicated to the construction of the “Limnes” Reception Centre for Applicants for International Protection and a Pre-removal Centre,
- a total of €6.7 million of European Union resources to provide accommodation to displaced Ukrainians, fully funded by the EU,

- €31 million for the implementation of two Special Actions, which are pertinent to the enhancement of the administrative capacity and the upgrade of the infrastructure of Social Welfare Services related to the sector of unaccompanied minors.

In total, for the implementation of the Programmes and actions of the Republic of Cyprus, within the context of the 2021-2027 Programming Period, a total amount of €276.4 million has been approved to date. At the same time, the European Commission has allocated directly to the International Organisation for Migration in Greece an amount of €22 million to upgrade the “Pournara” Reception Centre.

Apart from the financial aid provided to the Republic of Cyprus by the European Commission, the support with workforce provided within the context of the Cyprus Support Plan by the European Asylum Organisation is of equal importance. The workforce of the European Asylum Organisation who are employed in our country provide services for the examination of asylum applications, manning of the Reception and accommodation centres, facilitation of the relocation process, translation and education. At the same time, the Organisation contributes to equip the Centres, by providing prefabricated offices and/or residential units. Around 240 people from the European Asylum Organisation who work for the competent Departments are the largest group of the Organisation in a Member State and the total budget for 2022 reached €12 million.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

An important measure to combat illegal migration is the promotion of returns. By October, 25.3% of the applications submitted in 2023 were related to persons from secure countries. The percentage in 2021 and 2022 was 41.29% and 40.32% respectively.

Thus, the importance of promoting returns, which is a policy prioritised by the Ministry of Interior, is evident. This is shown by the fact that since April, the number of processed asylum applications has been gradually more than doubled, and in combination with the

decrease in the number of new applications by 50%, it has led to an increase of the number of returns by 60% compared to 2022. Specifically, in absolute numbers, until October 2023, 9,300 people left Cyprus, compared to 5,800 people who had left the country in the respective period in 2022. Taking into consideration the current situation for November, when the same increasing trend is observed, it is important to note that for the first time, the arrivals-returns balance is positive, with Cyprus being ranked at the first places among EU Member States in absolute numbers of returns.

The issue of returns requires coordinated actions on a European Union level. We consider as highly important the promotion of agreements with third countries, which is a measure included in the Action Plan for the Eastern Mediterranean and is expected to contribute as a relief for the Member States and in particular those at the front line.

At the same time, the establishment and operation of the Deputy Ministry of Migration and Asylum is an important parameter for the Government in the effort to holistically approach and effectively manage migration. The relevant bill is subject to discussion by the competent Committee of the House of Representatives and we hope that it will be soon submitted for voting in plenary.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I would like to thank the European Commission, the European Asylum Organisation and the International Organisation for Migration for their continuous practical support to the Republic of Cyprus and their contribution to our attempt for an effective management of migration. I would also like to congratulate the European Funds Unit for their exemplary management and high absorption of funds falling in the Home Affairs Funds.

I wish you a successful meeting.