

EU MEMBER STATES AND FRONTEX SHOW SUPPORT FOR ITALY AT MEETING TO DISCUSS OPERATION TRITON

Today, Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri, at the request of Italian authorities, held a meeting with representatives of Italy and EU Member States participating in agency's operation Triton in the Central Mediterranean.

The Executive Director of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, called on the Member States to stand by their pledges to reinforce operation Triton.

All participants recognised that Italy is facing extraordinary pressure and needs additional support from the EU and Frontex. The meeting focused on the topics raised during the informal JHA Council meeting in Tallinn last week, including support in returns of irregular migrants from Italy and the Code of Conduct for NGOs developed by the Italian authorities, in consultation with the European Commission.

Furthermore, Italy has indicated that in case of massive influx of migrants, it would like to be able to disembark migrants in the ports of other Member States.

It was agreed that a working group will be established without delay to further identify and elaborate what needs to be revised in the operational concept of Triton in view of decisions already reached at the political level, following the European Commission's Action plan presented at the informal JHA Council on 6 July.

This working group will further assess the situation following today's meeting and will draft a new operational plan. At a later stage, participating Member States will be consulted.

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and some participating Member States are willing to share their operational expertise to help develop the Code of Conduct for NGOs. When adopted, the working group will consider how it would impact Frontex operational activities.

Frontex currently deploys nearly 400 officers and support staff to assist Italy to handle migratory pressure and combat cross-border crime as part of operation Triton. The operation also includes 12 vessels, three aircraft and four helicopters.

Frontex is committed to reinforce its presence at hotspots in Italy to help the national authorities to speed up the process of identification and registration of migrants, as well as their referral to the asylum procedure. The agency will also intensify its role in combatting people smuggling networks.

Frontex proposed to expand the use of the agency's unique multipurpose aerial surveillance (MAS) operation. MAS involves the use of a surveillance plane which streams real-time video and other data from the Central Mediterranean directly to the Frontex Situation Centre (FSC) at the agency's headquarters in Warsaw.

The agency will work to integrate MAS services into the operational plan to make best use of it in operation Triton.

Frontex is ready to expand its support to Italy in the area of returns. Several Member States have already expressed readiness to participate in Rapid Return Operations. But this would require additional detention capacity for migrants who have been issued return decisions ahead of their return flights.