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Answer given by Mr Avramopoulos
on behalf of the European Commission
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The European Union together with its Member States has already implemented measures to counter irregular migration and, as a result, irregular arrivals to Europe are now down to the lowest level in 5 years. The European Union intends to continue to pursue these efforts.

The drastic reduction of irregular arrivals has been possible thanks to the strong partnerships that the European Union has developed with partner countries. Investing in third countries to improve the reception conditions of migrants, to fight smuggling networks, and to support these countries to develop their capacities to protect their borders and return of the irregular migrants has played a central role in the comprehensive migration strategy. The European Union therefore intends to pursue the cooperation as equal partners.

The European Commission has engaged with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to explore the concept of regional disembarkation arrangements. The objective of regional disembarkation arrangements is to establish predictable disembarkation and post-disembarkation procedures in line with international law and has never been about externalising responsibilities. So far, no third country has accepted to implement this concept. In a spirit of good cooperation, the Commission respects the position of third countries underlining that no decision should be imposed upon partners.

To combat irregular migration, the European Commission has also agreed to reinforce the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to protect better the EU's external borders, tabled a reform of the Return Directive and the European Commission monitors the implementation of 23 readmission agreements and arrangements with partner countries to facilitate the readmission of irregular migrants.

The latest Progress Report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration provides a detailed overview of EU's work in the field of the external dimension of migration and the prevention of irregular migration in general.¹

¹ COM(2019) 126 final of 6.3.2019.