**Christos Stylianides,** *Member of the Commission, on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy***.** – Madam President, we are following with great attention the unfolding situation of migrants across the Central American region. Thousands aim to cross the US-Mexico border in the hope of reaching safety and building a livelihood for themselves, their families and their children. The reasons are manifold and many were noted in the earlier debate of the previous European Parliament on 14 November 2018.

While the situation on the ground requires urgent responses by the relevant authorities, the root causes of the migratory flows that drive many to the US’s southern borders have long been present. Only a persistent, systematic and coordinated joint effort by the countries concerned in the international community may lead to an improvement on the ground. The European Union is concerned by reports about the current situation in the border areas. The separation of families of migrants, the cases of ill‑treatment of migrants, and of course the conditions in detention centres, as you have already emphasised.

The European Union continues to stand firmly on the side of human dignity. We reiterate the importance of protecting human rights and respecting international law, while we also recall the right of each country to manage its borders.

The European Union’s policy aims to promote regular and well-managed migration while addressing the root causes of irregular migration, enforced displacement and of course fighting human trafficking and smuggling. As the European Union, we have undertaken a strong effort in supporting the countries in the region, based on the principle of partnership and international cooperation in addressing migratory cooperation and challenges. Our policy builds on a comprehensive approach, which includes, first of all, saving lives, and secondly, ensuring protection and support, as well as legal pathways for those in need of international protection.

The European Union’s long-standing cooperation efforts towards the countries of the so-called ‘northern triangle’ – Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador – are in fact addressing the main drivers of migration. European Union cooperation has been strengthening the rule of law and fighting crime and gang violence, but also violence against women and vulnerable groups such as LGBTI or indigenous people. European Union funds have been provided to address the dire consequences of climate change, in particular in terms of food security, and to promote the creation of jobs, along with the opening of our markets.

In addition, in line with what we commit to do with our Mexican counterparts under the modernised EU-Mexico Association Agreement, we invite the US and Mexico to cooperate on migration issues to foster safe, regular and orderly migration to prevent irregular migration, to counter migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons. We also call for the protection of migrant women and children, particularly those who are unaccompanied, as well as other vulnerable groups.

As the European Union, we stand ready to work together with the countries concerned – the US, Mexico and Central American countries – in addressing this issue. In this respect, we support the El Salvador-Guatemala-Honduras-Mexico Comprehensive Development Plan, as proposed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, currently being developed and discussed with partners in the region which, as you know, aims at addressing the root causes of irregular migration.