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Statement

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European Parliament**

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**President Tajani,
President Juncker,
President Tusk (*tbc*),
High Representative Mogherini,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I commend the European Parliament for organizing this conference at a pivotal moment for the international community as we have embarked on a process to develop a *Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration*.

Today, I would like to touch upon some crucial issues that you will be discussing and which demand a greater collective response: tackling root causes, addressing irregular migration, implementing returns and promoting integration.

Fostering prosperity and tackling root causes

A *crisis of migration governance* at the national, regional and global levels continues to unfold. In 2017, more than 2,400 women, men and children have lost their

lives on migratory routes worldwide – more than 70% in the Mediterranean.

Too many individuals, compelled to make desperate choices, are paying the ultimate price in their search for safety and dignity abroad.

The motivations – and pressures on the free exercise of choice – that are involved in real life decisions whether to move or stay put are complex and multi-layered.

Some flee persecution and conflict.

Others escape severe hardship: food insecurity, poverty, the adverse effects of climate change, or some combination of the above.

While the legal status of refugees is clear, one cannot conclude that others on the move do so voluntarily or are primarily motivated by economic reasons.

Greater understanding of the complex, shifting motivations that can compel an individual to migrate and of their protection needs is required if effective measures

are to be put in place both to better manage these flows and, where desirable, reduce them.

The *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, unanimously adopted by the UN, recognized that migration should be through choice, not necessity.

To ensure that, we already have many of the tools by which to tackle drivers of migration. Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with the international human rights framework, will go far in reducing stresses that propel many to leave their country.

But development alone will not eradicate migration. Nor should that be our aim.

Let us be clear: the Global Compact project is about *facilitating* safe, orderly and regular mobility. It is neither about curtailing it, nor stopping it. And when we address the drivers of migration we need to recognize the strong pull factors that contribute to the choice of destination. These include the underground economy which for many provides sufficient promise.

Regular migration pathways

Our common objective should be to increase a variety of legal pathways to regular migration, thereby enhancing public trust in state capacity to manage domestic labour markets including through the essential input of migrants.

By 2020 the EU is set to face a shortfall of one million health workers, while thousands of vacancies remain unfilled in the field of information technology.

I recognize the opportunity for flexible labour market access provided to high-skilled migrants through the Blue Card scheme. But I believe this need not be restricted to high-skilled targets.

Facilitating access to regular migration through expanded opportunities for labour mobility, as well as for family reunification and for education, will reduce the need for many to migrate through irregular channels, while meeting a clear need for labour in many societies.

Implementing return decisions

Excellencies,

Return and readmission are necessary for border governance and require enhanced international cooperation. But they must be conducted in safety and dignity and with respect for human rights. Protection cannot be compromised; nor can it be outsourced. Returns must be consistent with the principle of non-refoulement, the best interests of children and due process.

Just laws justly enforced are key to the EU's foundation and partly what makes it a pole of attraction. If these were to be eroded in a likely futile effort to keep migrants away, the costs to the integrity of the European project risk being high.

Promoting integration and countering xenophobia

Finally, I want to touch on the issue of integration and anti-migrant sentiment in Europe. I share the concerns for migrants being vilified as 'burdens' or 'threats': of being somehow undeserving of protection.

Left unchallenged, these perceptions risk obscuring the positive reality of migration for both countries of origin and destination.

I call on the EU to step up action to counter xenophobia and promote the successful integration of migrants, including through addressing their vulnerabilities, as well as the needs of the communities that host them.

Excellencies,

Upholding the legal obligations and political commitments of EU Members States will require approaches to migration based on genuine collective efforts and solidarity within and among all countries, whether principally of origin, transit or destination, to *facilitate* mobility in a safe, orderly and regular fashion.

I look forward to working with you toward that end.