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Launching operations of the European Border Patrols Network: a new tool to tighten up control and management of the EU's Southern maritime borders

Today FRONTEX (the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union), together with the Member States concerned, launched the European Border Patrols Network. The objective is to curb illegal immigration across the Mediterranean Sea and along the South-West Atlantic coasts and to detect emergencies at sea, thus reducing loss of life. The European Border Patrols Network will facilitate closer co-ordinated and cost-effective operational co-operation between the national authorities responsible for patrolling the Member States' Southern external maritime borders.

Vice-President Franco Frattini, Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, said: "The European Patrols Network is further proof of Europe's added value in managing the EU's Southern sea borders. The challenge posed by illegal immigration calls for innovative instruments and courageous political initiatives. As shown by the recent tragedy near Malta, involving the likely death of 50 immigrants, all efforts to reduce the loss of life at sea, such as the European Border Patrols Network, are essential, and I am ready and willing to support it". The Vice-President added: "The Patrols Network will help the Member States concerned to forge a European team spirit, which will further develop mutual trust and a culture of exchanging all relevant information regularly, and at the same time to use their available resources more efficiently, thus achieving positive synergies and economies of scale. Eventually the Network should also envisage the direct involvement of interested third countries to make it become truly effective".

Europe has conceived this new tool to foster cooperation and exchanges of information between Member States with the aim of improving joint management of the EU's maritime borders. It is designed as a flexible new structure, built around burden-sharing, which can be adjusted swiftly to respond to the evolving needs of Member States. The Network will enable the Member States along the South-West Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean Sea, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Slovenia, Malta, Greece and Cyprus, to develop an overall plan for conducting specific operations, including surveillance in selected areas of the sea. Furthermore, as the Network would require National Co-ordination Centres responsible for planning and operational co-ordination with other Member States and also for co-operation within their own Member State, it is sure to improve co-operation and the flow of information at national level between the different authorities involved in managing external borders.

Member States participating in patrol activities in the context of this new Network will not be using the CRATE (Centralised Record of Available Technical Equipment- also known as "toolbox") made available to Frontex at the beginning of 2007. This equipment is not yet ready for use, as specific memoranda of understanding have to be signed between Frontex and the Member States concerned. Each Member State participating will therefore deploy its own resources.

For further information on the activities of Vice-President Frattini, please visit his website at: http://www.ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/frattini/index_en.htm