

# **EU states call for stronger protection of external borders, including new migrant return system**

EU ministers have asked for more action to strengthen the bloc's external borders as well as for rules to return migrants to their homelands or where they started their journeys.

Interior ministers from EU countries including Greece, Poland, Italy and France – as well as non-aligned Switzerland and Norway, attended a border security conference in Lithuania's capital Vilnius.

European Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson and the heads of European security bodies like Europol and Frontex, the EU's border agency, also joined the talks.

The ministers described the influx of migrants as dramatic and urged swift actions, including reinforcing the EU's borders and cracking down on people smugglers to protect both EU citizens and the lives of migrants and refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia who undertake hazardous journeys to reach Europe.

"We can do much more on returns if we establish a European return system," Ms Johansson said. She said she will discuss the plan in more detail at a ministerial meeting in France next month.

Ms Johansson stressed that all EU nations should "systematically check travellers against relevant databases at entry and exit of the (bloc's internal visa-free) Schengen area", and called for a strengthening of Frontex.

Notis Mitarachi, Greece's minister of migration, said the current system is not working.

"If people have the right to arrive in any European member state without papers and without due process, then the whole Schengen visa system, is meaningless,"

he said.

Poland is about to start building a tall, permanent metal wall with electronic surveillance systems along its land border with Belarus to prevent unauthorised entries.

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