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Dear President Ueberschär,
Dear President Le Roy,
Dear National Spokesperson Melchionda,
Dear Secretary General Zocconi,

I would like to thank you for having shared with President von der Leyen the views of the signatories, across Europe, of the “Rome Declaration”. I am replying on the President’s behalf, as the Commissioner for Home Affairs.

Let me assure you that the measures proposed under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted on 23 September 2020, strive to reach a balance between solidarity and responsibility, in full respect of fundamental rights. They are based on humanity and solidarity with the most affected countries. Unhindered access to asylum is an essential EU value, enshrined in EU and international law. With this New Pact, we are striving to create a more effective and fair system for all.

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum therefore covers all elements needed for a comprehensive European approach to migration, bringing together policy in the areas of migration, asylum, integration, return, and border management. This common response also covers the EU’s relationships with third countries, as the internal and external dimensions of migration are inextricably linked. All measures proposed under the Pact respect fundamental rights and include the necessary guarantees for vulnerable applicants, including children.

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The proposed screening procedure seeks to ensure that those who are especially vulnerable and in need of protection are identified faster to get the assistance they need. The border procedure would only apply in limited circumstances and when a number of safeguards can be complied with. Every person will still have an individual assessment, and essential guarantees will be respected. The implementation of the border procedure will be monitored by the EU Asylum Agency, to ensure that fundamental rights are being respected. Detention continues to be a measure of last resort, and Member States bear the responsibility of implementation of effective alternatives to detention in accordance to EU *acquis*.

The New Pact recognises that no Member State should shoulder a disproportionate responsibility and that all Member States should constantly contribute to solidarity. Solidarity is not optional. We need an efficient system that responds to the needs on the ground, with sufficient flexibility to ensure that all Member States contribute to solidarity. This is essential to support Member States under migratory pressure and ensure that the Union fulfils its humanitarian obligations, both in normal times, and in times of crisis.

Search and rescue at sea is a legal obligation and a humanitarian imperative. Private vessels must operate responsibly but should not be criminalised for their activities. To avoid tragic incidents at sea, maintain safety of navigation, and ensure effective migration management, cooperation and information exchange should be enhanced between different actors in search and rescue operations. We also propose a predictable system where Member States of first entry have a guarantee to receive solidarity from others.

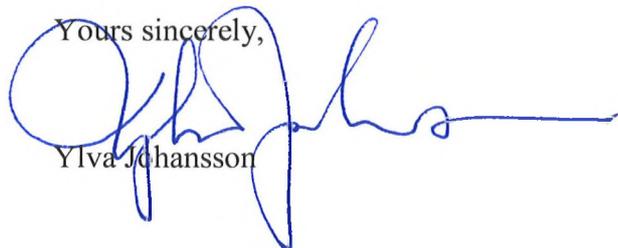
Migration is a phenomenon that is here to stay. It is a defining feature of humanity. The New Pact will ensure that humanitarian and legal migration channels are in place for persons in need of international protection so that they can reach the EU safely. Resettlement is the key legal pathway to protection, which remains a top priority and should be further expanded. We could also do more as regards labour migration, and I hope that an agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the Blue Card could be found swiftly. The EU will also support Member States wishing to establish community or private sponsorship schemes. On this, the New Pact also recognises that local authorities have a key role to play.

Everyone who has a right to be in Europe should be welcomed and integrated in Europe. That is why we have presented a new Action Plan on integration and inclusion on 24 November 2020. This Action Plan provides strategic guidance and sets out concrete actions, – including financial support on the EU level – to foster the inclusion of migrants, bringing together relevant stakeholders and recognising the key role of regional and local actors.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the work done by the local and regional authorities, civil society and non-governmental organisations, at any level, on migration, including by protecting fundamental rights and helping migrants to start a new life and integrate in cohesive societies.

I would therefore express my readiness to pursue the fruitful discussion with various actors at any levels, as full partners of the comprehensive New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ylva Johansson', written over the text 'Yours sincerely,'.

Ylva Johansson