

## **Joint Declaration of the MED-9 Ministers of the Interior**

**Rovinj, 18 - 19 May 2026**

We, the Ministers responsible for internal affairs, security, migration and asylum of the MED-9 Member States, met in Rovinj on 18 and 19 May 2026 under the Croatian Chairmanship, with the participation of the European Commission, Frontex, Europol, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), eu-LISA, the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) and the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N). This meeting marked the first MED-9 ministerial gathering in this format.

Our discussions were held in a constructive and cooperative spirit, focusing on key challenges affecting frontline Member States and the wider Mediterranean region, in particular migration management, the fight against migrant smuggling and the evolving security risks linked to organised crime, including maritime drug trafficking.

This meeting took place at a particularly relevant moment for the European Union, against a broader geopolitical context marked by the current developments in the MENA region, which may have an impact on migratory pressures and deteriorating security dynamics in the Mediterranean region.

### **Towards a Safer Mediterranean: Migration Management and External Borders**

In such complex circumstances, we reaffirm our shared commitment to ensuring a secure and well-functioning Schengen area, which requires effective management of the European Union's external borders, while ensuring that any internal border controls are exceptional and applied strictly in accordance with the Schengen Borders Code and the principles of necessity and proportionality, in full respect of EU and international law, including on fundamental rights.

We also acknowledge that, as the Pact on Migration and Asylum approaches its full implementation, ensuring its smooth and effective application remains of particular importance.

In practical terms, this requires, in accordance with the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, the effective and balanced functioning of the system as a whole, including screening, consistent registration in Eurodac, efficient border procedures, effective prevention of unauthorised secondary movements, compliance with the relevant asylum and reception standards with a view to greater convergence, and effective solidarity responding to the needs of Member States under migratory pressure.

We shared a common understanding that the credibility and sustainability of the Union's migration framework are also closely linked to the prevention of irregular arrivals and the capacity to ensure efficient and sustainable returns. Strengthened cooperation with key partner countries remain crucial in this regard. In particular, we consider it essential to develop common strategies to strengthen assisted voluntary returns from transit countries to countries of origin.

At the same time, we reaffirm the importance of search and rescue obligations in full respect of relevant international law and the need to reconcile them with security imperatives, ensuring that humanitarian considerations are addressed without compromising safety.

Migrant smuggling continues to represent a key enabler of irregular migration. Addressing this serious form of organised crime therefore requires further strengthening efforts to counter smuggling networks along the main migratory routes, in particular through enhanced cooperation among the competent authorities of Member States and partner countries of origin, transit and final destination, as well as with relevant EU agencies.

We take note of the initiatives of the European Commission to prevent irregular migration flows before they reach Libya or along the Channel route. Further efforts are needed on prevention along all migratory routes, including the Mediterranean and Atlantic routes. They represent key elements of a comprehensive approach aimed at tackling the main migrant smuggling routes.

We underline that such cooperation should include improved information exchange and, where appropriate, financial investigations and action against the misuse of online platforms and commercial transport channels.

More broadly, a balanced whole-of-route approach combining internal measures with a strong and operational external dimension remains essential. This includes tailored partnerships with key third countries, combining operational cooperation, capacity-building and targeted support along migratory routes.

In this regard, we underline the strategic importance of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling and the Pact for the Mediterranean as frameworks for structured, comprehensive and mutually beneficial cooperation with our southern and eastern partners along all the key migratory routes. We highlight the need to further develop their operational dimension in addressing shared security challenges in the region.

We also emphasize the importance of strengthening preparedness and contingency planning to ensure a timely and coordinated response to variations in the level and pattern of migratory pressure.

## **Strengthening Internal Security: Combating Organised Crime and Maritime Drug Trafficking**

Maritime drug trafficking represents an increasingly significant and evolving challenge for the European Union's internal security, with implications for the integrity of supply chains, the security of critical port infrastructures, as well as the safety of communities.

With the Mediterranean emerging as a distinct corridor, the Mediterranean ports are gaining in importance for organised crime groups seeking to smuggle drugs into the Union. Therefore, these ports require particular attention, including in terms of risk analysis, security standards and resilience against organised crime infiltration, including corruption, as well as risks related to insider threats and the improper use of access to sensitive operational information.

We call for strengthening cooperation among police, customs, maritime authorities and other competent bodies in accordance with their respective fields of competences, as well as between public authorities and private partners, including shipping companies, port authorities and terminal operators. We also call, where appropriate, for the further use of existing EU cooperation frameworks and joint operational tools.

We acknowledge that criminal networks are increasingly adapting their methods, including by using smaller vessels, offshore transfer techniques, concealment within legitimate cargo and other evolving, technology-enabled trafficking methods, which altogether require a forward-looking response.

In this context, we also stress the importance of joint operational activities, as well as leveraging innovative and emerging technologies to enhance port and maritime security, including by strengthening risk analysis, detection capabilities and timely and secure information exchange.

Particular importance should therefore be attached to enhancing maritime situational awareness and intelligence-sharing across the full supply chain including, where appropriate, by better use of relevant economic and financial information to support the identification of high-risk consignments and suspicious flows from countries of origin and transit to entry points within the European Union.

We take note of relevant EU initiatives, namely the EU Drugs Strategy, the Action Plan against drug trafficking, the European Ports Alliance, the EU Ports Strategy, the European customs alliance at borders – as well as the European Coalition Against Drugs, and underline the importance of their effective and coherent implementation in the Mediterranean region, including by strengthening risk-based approaches, anti-corruption safeguards and the appropriate involvement of law enforcement authorities in port security frameworks.

In parallel, cooperation with partner countries in the Mediterranean region, *inter alia*, by enhancing customs cooperation, joint risk assessments and enhanced information exchange, remains essential for strengthening port security and disrupting trafficking networks at source

and along key maritime routes, with the Pact for the Mediterranean providing an important framework for such cooperation.

We recognise the challenges arising from the use of new technologies, including encrypted communications, by criminal networks, and underline the need for further reflection at EU level on appropriate responses.

### **Role of EU Agencies, Operational Cooperation and EU funding**

We welcome the strong support provided by EU agencies and MAOC-N to Member States in migration management, including asylum and return, as well as in the fight against organised crime, such as migrant smuggling and drug trafficking.

In particular, we recognise the role of EU agencies in providing operational support, training, guidance and tools to facilitate the full effective and consistent implementation of relevant EU legislation, in particular the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

We call for further strengthening of their cooperation with partner countries in addressing all these challenges, including through tailored partnerships and operational arrangements and capacity building.

Commensurate with the growing challenges faced by the Mediterranean Member States, we also stress the need to ensure adequate EU funding for home affairs policies, in both their internal and external dimensions, including through Global Europe Instrument.

Adopted in Rovinj on 19 May 2026.