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Malta aims for inter-institutional agreement to transform EASO into EU Asylum Agency to be reached by the end of its Council Presidency

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As Presidency of the Council of the European Union, one of Malta's main priorities is seeing through a European inter-institutional agreement on the European Commission's proposal to transform the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) into a fully-fledged EU Agency for Asylum to reflect its enhanced role in a reformed Common European Asylum System. This has already been undertaken successfully with Frontex, which last year became the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

"EASO's activities have been increasing multifold at the practical level, and now it is high time to put the legal basis in place to reflect that reality," Carmelo Abela, Minister for Home Affairs and National Security, said in a message sent to a joint EASO-Frontex management board meeting held in Malta, where EASO is headquartered. "We hope that, by the end of our Presidency, we would have reached an agreement so that the legislative proposal comes into effect and start being implemented as early as possible."

The meeting took place in St Julian's on Wednesday, 8 February 2017. This was the very first time that the management boards of these two European entities held a joint session. On this occasion, they also signed the first EASO-Frontex annual cooperation plan.

"EASO and Frontex have become the pillars of our efforts in dealing with migration and asylum, and we look to them for support," said Minister Abela. "In this light, today's meeting is highly symbolic of the importance of further cooperation between these two entities, that are at the very forefront in this area. Given the reality on the ground, a closer partnership between them is no longer an option but a necessity. Indeed, I look on this joint meeting of the two boards, taking place in our country during the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as a historic occasion."

The Minister expressed his appreciation for the work that is carried out by both entities and commended the way information gathered by them is reported in a regular manner. They keep the EU Member States informed about the situation at the border crossing points; about trends in migration, including areas of particular pressure as well as the nationalities of migrants; and about the asylum situation

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throughout the whole of the Union. It is through EASO and Frontex's work, he said, that the various Frontex operations take place and that guidance and support to the Member States' asylum determination authorities is provided.

Minister Abela maintained that Member States need to sustain the endeavours of Frontex and EASO by deploying experts to carry out the necessary work. Pointing out that the system is already in place, more or less, when it comes to Frontex, he said that more efforts are needed in the deployment of experts to EASO.



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Photo caption: (from left to right) Carmelo Abela, Minister for Home Affairs and National Security; Marko Gasperlin, Chair of Frontex's management board; José Carreira, EASO Executive Director; and Fabrice Leggeri, Frontex Executive Director.