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People-smuggling gangs netted up to 6 billion euros (\$6.6 billion) last year, most of it from the traffic of migrants into Europe, the European Union's police agency Europol said in a report issued on Monday.



MACEDONIA BORDER CLOSURE STRANDS THOUSANDS IN GREECE

BBC.COM

Thousands of migrants and refugees have been stranded near Athens and on Greece's northern border after Macedonia stopped allowing Afghans in.

More than 5,000 people were stuck at or near the border and at one point several tried to storm the fence. Four thousand more arrived by sea from the Aegean islands at Piraeus port.

Macedonia said on Sunday it was following other governments by allowing in only Syrians and Iraqis.

Greece protested against the decision. After Syrians, Afghans made up the second largest number of people seeking asylum in the EU in 2015, according to official figures.

The Macedonian move came three days after Austria imposed a daily limit of 80 asylum claims on its southern border.

Although EU officials said the Austrian limit was incompatible with human rights conventions, Balkan states along the migrant route from Greece responded by implementing their own restrictions.

In the past year, the vast majority of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe have taken the route through Greece, in the hope of claiming asylum in Germany or other EU countries. More than 1.1 million people arrived in Germany alone in 2015.

EU police agency Europol said on Monday that 90% of them had used a "facilitation service", offered mainly by criminal smuggling groups.



EU COMMISSION HAS 'NO PLAN B' IF THE UK LEAVES UNION

IRISHTIMES.COM



The European Commission has said it has "no plan B" in the event that the UK chooses to leave the European Union, as Downing Street dismissed suggestions of a second referendum.

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AS POUND PLUNGES, UK'S CAMERON DEFENDS EU DEAL TO AVERT 'BREXIT'

REUTERS.COM



The pound posted its biggest one-day loss in almost six years on Monday on concerns of a possible British exit from the EU, adding to the pressure on Prime Minister David Cameron as he mounted a defense of his deal to keep the country in the bloc.

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GERMANY SETS TWO-WEEK ULTIMATUM FOR EU REFUGEE PLAN

THELOCAL.COM

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere has given Europe two weeks to implement measures agreed last week's EU summit - if not "other measures will be necessary", he warned.

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ITALY'S RENZI 'HUNGRY' FOR CHANGE IN EUROPE

EURACTIV.COM

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi on Monday defended his score card after two years in power and said he was "hungry" to push on with reforms at home and in Europe. "Italy is no longer Europe's problem. Italy is strong, solid, but it still has lots to do and I still have the same hunger I had the first day in office," he told journalists at the Foreign Press Association in Rome.

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EUROZONE PMI FALLS TO LOWEST IN A YEAR

FT.COM

An important indicator of the eurozone's economic health dipped to its lowest level in more than a year in February, raising the chances of a more aggressive policy response from the European Central Bank next month.

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SCHENGEN COLLAPSE COULD COST EU UP TO 1.4 TRILLION EUROS OVER DECADE

REUTERS.COM

A collapse of Europe's Schengen passport-free travel zone could cost the European Union up to 1.4 trillion euros (1.1 trillion pounds) over the next decade, a study by Germany's Bertelsmann Foundation showed on Monday.

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WELCOME FOR NEW MISSION TO SMASH PEOPLE TRAFFICKERS

ECRGROUP.COM

Yesterday the European Commission launched its EUROPOL European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) in The Hague, which will proactively support EU Member States in dismantling criminal networks involved in organized migrant smuggling.

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23 FEBRUARY, 2016

THE AGENDA

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

- 9:00 **Committee on Foreign Affairs**. The agenda includes: 2015 Report on Montenegro (rapporteur **Charles Tannock**, ECR). 11.30 discussion with VP/HR **Federica Mogherini** on the conflicts in the MENA region and the refugee crisis. 15:00 discussion with **Nabih Berri**, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament. 16.00 jointly with the SEDE and in association with the Delegation for relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly - exchange of views with the Secretary General of NATO, **Jens Stoltenberg**, on NATO priorities for 2016 and the July 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw (JAN - 2Q2).
- 9:00 **Committee on Budgetary Control**. The agenda includes: Discharge 2014: EU general budget - Council and European Council (rapporteur **Ryszard Czarnecki**, ECR) (ASP - 1G-3).
- 9:00 **Committee on Employment and Social Affairs**. The agenda includes: Discussion with **James Calleja**, Director of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (JAN - 6Q2).
- 9:00 **Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety**. The agenda includes: Discussion with **Andrea Ammon**, acting Director of ECDC, Mandatory indication of the country of origin or place of provenance for certain foods (adoption of questions for oral answer, co-rapporteurs **Renate Sommer**, EPP, **Glenis Willmott**, S&D, **Julie Girling**, ECR, **Anneli Jäätteenmäki**, ALDE, **Lynn Boylan**, GUE/NGL, **Michèle Rivasi**, Greens/EFA, **Piernicola Pedicini**, EFDD, Matteo Salvini, ENF) (JAN - 4Q2).
- 9:00 **Committee on Industry, Research and Energy**. The agenda includes: Structured Dialogue European Parliament - European Commission - discussion with **Tibor Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (SPH - 1A002).
- 9:00 **Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection**. The agenda includes: Control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (discussion, rapporteur **Vicky Ford**, ECR), Discussion with **Pierre Moscovici**, Commissioner responsible for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs (ASP - 3G-3).
- 9:00 **Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development**. The agenda includes: Animal Health (vote on draft recommendation for second reading, rapporteur **Jasenko Selimovic**, ALDE) (JAN - 4Q1).
- 9:00 **Committee on Constitutional Affairs**. The agenda includes: Renegotiation of the United Kingdom constitutional relationship with the European Union - discussion with **Jonathan Faull**, Head of the Commission Task Force for Strategic Issues related to the UK Referendum, Annual report 2014 on subsidiarity and proportionality (rapporteur for the opinion **Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski**, ECR) (ASP - 3E-2).
- 9:00 **Committee on Petitions**. The agenda includes: Hearing on taking citizens' concerns seriously: broadening the scope of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights (ASP - 3G2).
- 10:00 **Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs**. The agenda includes: 11:15 appointment of a new Executive Director of the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority - discussion with **Fausto Parente**, selected candidate for the position. Appointment of a new Executive Director of the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (adoption of draft report), European Deposit Insurance Scheme (First exchange of views, rapporteur **Esther de Lange**, PPE) (PSH - 3C50).
- 15:00 **Committee on Budgets**. The agenda includes: Estimates of revenue and expenditure for the financial year 2017 - Section I - European Parliament - discussion in the presence of Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament responsible for the budget and the Secretary General, **Klaus Welle** (rapporteur

Indrek Tarand, Greens/EFA) (ASP - 5G-3).

- 16:30 President of the European Parliament **Martin Schulz** will meet **Dietmar Woidke**, Minister President of Brandenburg (PSH, Grand Salon Protocolaire).

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

- Yesterday, the Commission, in partnership with the **European Investment Bank** (EIB), published guidelines to help local authorities and project promoters make full use of the opportunities of combining **European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds** with the **European Fund for Strategic Investments**, the heart of the Investment Plan for Europe.

WHO WHEN WHERE

- 9:00 **ENRD** workshop on 'Financing opportunities for projects - The investment plan for Europe' takes place in Thon Hotel in Brussels. Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development **Phil Hogan** gives a speech there.
- 10:00 'International conference on enforcement in a Europe without borders' holds on Amsterdam. (Marine Etablissement Amsterdam).
- 12:30 a two-day 'Citizens' Energy Forum' starts in London. (Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street).

TODAY CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS



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