President,

Honourable Members,

I am grateful to the Parliament for the opportunity to assess the implementation of the Stockholm Programme. Your question is very wide in scope, and given the short time available to me, I will only be able to give a limited response. Nevertheless I hope that it will become clear that we have made - and continue to make - significant progress in this whole area.

The JHA Council last December carried out a mid-term review of the Stockholm Programme. Ministers' discussions were based on an overview of progress drawn up by the Cyprus Presidency. This overview consisted of an assessment of progress in all areas covered by the Stockholm programme - asylum and migration, civil and criminal justice, internal security, civil protection and external relations in the JHA field.

The Council debate served as a response to the European Council's request, when it adopted the Stockholm Programme, for a mid-term review. The Cyprus Presidency subsequently informed the President of the European Council in writing of the outcome of the Council debate. It was noted in particular (and I quote) that: " the debate in the Council showed in general satisfaction with the progress made to date as well as confirmation of the need to take forward work on those elements of the Stockholm Programme which remain outstanding in order to continue to secure for our citizens an
area of freedom, security and justice. The usefulness of a programme such as the Stockholm Programme was also underlined by a number of delegations as a guideline for defining legislative and operational priorities.

The Council debate also enabled ministers to reiterate their commitment to maintaining the right balance between security concerns and the protection of individual rights.

I cannot here provide an exhaustive list of the substantial number of measures which have been agreed since 2010. However I would highlight a few in particular. In the area of asylum and immigration, a comprehensive set of measures relating to the Common European Asylum System is being finalised and the European Asylum Support Office has become operational. A Joint EU Resettlement Programme was agreed and Regional Protection Programmes further developed, and a Directive on a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in Member States was adopted.

In terms of specific operational measures, the Visa Information System VIS was launched, the IT agency became operational and SIS II went live last April.

In the area of Justice, the Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime was adopted and a Regulation on mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters was agreed. As far as internal security measures are concerned, a number of important directives were adopted. These include measures to ensure better protection against large-scale cyber attacks, strengthened measures for preventing on-line child sexual abuse, to facilitate the prosecution of perpetrators and to improve the protection of child victims, as well as a Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings.

In general, the Council takes the view that a particular focus should now be given to implementing legislation which has already been adopted and to ensuring that measures already agreed are made fully operational.

As far as the institutional arrangements are concerned, the Council considers that the application of the ordinary legislative procedure functions well, strengthening the
commitment of both our institutions to cooperate in ensuring that the area of freedom, security and justice is completed and made fully operational.

The instruments established under the Lisbon Treaty have already proved useful. A standing committee in the Council ensures effective operational cooperation on internal security, and other measures, such as the Solidarity clause will doubtless in future help further strengthen cooperation. The establishment of the European External Action Service continues to contribute to ensuring good coordination where there is an external dimension to JHA policies.

President,
Honourable Members

Overall I believe we can look with some satisfaction at what has been achieved under the Stockholm Programme. That of course should never lead us to be complacent. This does not just apply to the Council, but also the Parliament. I think that both our institutions need to demonstrate in practice our commitment to making rapid progress on implementing the remainder of the Stockholm Programme and in fulfilling our shared objective of creating a more secure, more open and fairer Europe.

I thank you for your attention.

ENDS