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Dear Minister, Dear Kalin,

In March this year, we set up our joint pilot project for fast asylum and return procedures, as a direct follow-up to the EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans from December 2022, President von der Leyen's letter of 26 January 2023 to European Council Leaders, and the European Council conclusions of 9 February 2023.

I would like to thank you for the constructive dialogue, pro-active engagement and concrete progress made since the start of the pilot by the Bulgarian authorities. The Steering Committee of 20 September showcased the very encouraging results achieved by the pilot so far, which I am sure will result in good practices to be replicated in other Member States.

I would like to highlight in particular the intensified cooperation with EU Agencies (EUAA, Europol and Frontex), such as with Frontex in the areas of border management and returns and the establishment of the Operational Task Force with Europol; the positive steps taken to facilitate the implementation of the asylum accelerated procedures; and the launch of the process to improve the digitalisation of the asylum and return system. A detailed progress report on the pilot project is attached to this letter.

With a view to further capitalise on the positive achievements so far and ensure an efficient implementation of measures put in place under the pilot project, I am happy that we will have the opportunity to continue working closely in this framework, including by identifying potential new areas of cooperation, with the necessary support by the Commission and EU Agencies.

Yours sincerely,

Ylva JOHANSSON

Mr. Kalin STOYANOV
Minister of Interior
Republic of Bulgaria