

To
Michael O'Flaherty
Commissioner for Human Rights
Gaëlle Bausson
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France

Mag. Gerhard Karner
Bundesminister

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Vienna, 15 July 2026

Distinguished Commissioner O'Flaherty,

Thank you for your letter dated 8th July 2026 setting out your observations and recommendations concerning the planned establishment of return hubs.

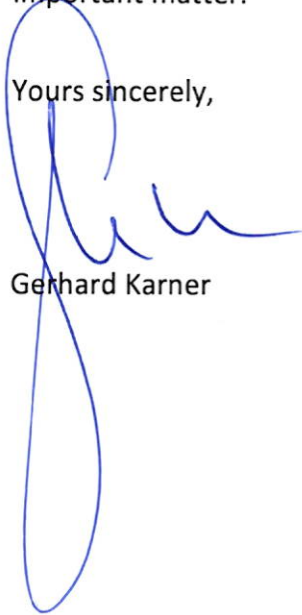
We all agree that our current migration and return system needs to be adjusted when it comes to its effectiveness and I welcome the work and progress that has been achieved during the past years. In this context, I would like to underline that the negotiations on the Return Regulation will provide for a more coherent migration policy, supporting effective and efficient procedures on the one hand and providing for new and innovative solutions on the other hand. The implementation of return hubs in accordance with full respect of fundamental rights is a core element of the Return Regulation. In particular, the provisions will set out new possibilities for Member States while fully providing for safeguards and ensuring compliance with fundamental rights, including provisions relating to cooperation with third countries, monitoring arrangements and accountability mechanisms.

At the same time, I would like to highlight that any measures taken by Austria are in full compliance with the obligations arising under European Union and International law, including International Human Rights Standards, recognizing that establishing these return

hubs requires a sound and robust legal framework. These considerations will be duly taken into account when setting up and operationalizing the work of a return hub.

Thank you once again for your contribution and for your continued engagement on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'G' followed by a series of loops and a long vertical stroke extending downwards.

Gerhard Karner