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MISSION REPORT

following the mission to Greece (17 - 20 May 2016)

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

Members of the mission:

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I. Background and objective of the mission

The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) decided to include this mission to Greece in its planning of missions for the first semester of 2016 against the background of the current refugee and migration crisis and the challenges related to the management of the external borders of the EU.

The delegation visit was designed as a fact-finding mission to explore the situation on the ground regarding the implementation of asylum and migration as well as external borders policies. The programme included therefore visits of refugee camps and hotspots, and of the region of the Greece-FYROM border in Greece. During the visit, the delegation met with representatives of the Greek authorities, European and international organisations, including the European Commission, relevant EU agencies and the UNHCR, as well as non-governmental organisations.

The policy department prepared a background study for the mission, with a special focus on the hotspots approach¹.

II. Briefing Meeting on 11 May 2016

A preparatory meeting preceded the delegation visit which took place in Strasbourg with visio-conference connections with Brussels and Athens.

From Athens, **Maarten VERWEY**, the Special Coordinator of the European Commission for the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement set out how the situation had evolved since 20 March 2016. While a drop in arrivals had been observed, the number of asylum applications in Greece had risen dramatically since the closure of the Greek border with FYROM. In addition, the statement made admissibility checks of all new arrivals on the islands necessary. Both facts put pressure on the Greek asylum system that had only recently been reformed to comply with relevant EU legislation. Despite the support of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the seconded experts from Member States, Greece lagged behind with registration and reception of asylum seekers and the processing of applications. Consequently, the situation on the islands was difficult because of overcrowding of facilities and lengthy procedures. After 25 days, asylum seekers are able to leave the hotspot during the day with the obligation to stay on the island. On the short term, information provided to migrants about the procedures following the EU-Turkey statement was needed as well as the amelioration of the situation of vulnerable groups. In particular, unaccompanied minors should be taken care of outside the camps. Long stays in overcrowded camps together with the vanishing hope for a future in Europe had led to frustrations and consequently to security incidents. **Maarten VERWEY** underlined the valuable support of NGOs in the reception of the refugees.

Dana SPINANT from the Commission's Unit on Irregular Migration and Return (DG HOME) set out that for the full working of the EU-Turkey statement, legislation allowing for fast track procedures and speedy returns to Turkey had been adopted by Greece, including the

¹ European Parliament, Policy Department Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Darren NEVILLE, Sarah SY, Amalia RIGON, On the frontline: the hotspot approach to managing migration, PE556.992.

concept of safe countries of origin and transit, while guaranteeing access to individual interviews. From the Turkish side, legislation needed to allow for temporary protection of all Syrians and access of all other nationals to asylum procedures. The latter will be subject to an evaluation after one year. For the moment, only those who did not apply for asylum in Greece were returned to Turkey on the basis of the bilateral readmission agreement between Greece and Turkey.

Regarding border management, **Maarten VERWEY** pointed to the closed border with FYROM, the co-operation of Frontex with the Greek authorities and financing by the EU of measures implemented by Greece. Greece received also support for the control of their maritime borders from NATO.

According to **Eleonora VERGEER** from the Commission's Border management and Schengen Unit (DG HOME) Greece had no integrated border management strategy and no multi-annual programme despite improvements through such help of third parties due to a lack of capacity, partly related to the financial crisis.

Francisca BATISTA DA SILVA, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), set out that the asylum process under the EU-Turkey statement was confusing, and that access to legal aid, albeit available, was difficult. Through the new admissibility procedure, asylum seekers had to prove that there was reason not to return them to Turkey (reversed burden of proof). The so-called access to the asylum procedures via skype did not exist. People could consequently not register. Many had documents that had expired and lived in a legal limbo. Consequently, moving on through smuggling remained the most successful way but there are also others who give up when family reunification entitlements don't materialise. Furthermore, camp/hotspot buildings were inappropriate and food was a concern. She regretted that unaccompanied minors were held in detention because of a lack of alternatives. MSF held reports that refugees were attacked by police forces.

III. Overview of situation of refugees in Greece, the legal and de facto treatment of refugees in Greece and the cooperation between Greece, the EU and Turkey in the context of the migration crisis¹

“According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures, up to 9 May 2016, 184,913 refugees and migrants arrived by sea in the first quarter of 2016 alone, as against 1,015,078 in 2015 and 216,054 in 2014. This marks a sharp increase in migratory flows over the past year and a half, with Greece very much on the frontline. According to Frontex figures, up to the end of March, 153,082 people had illegally entered Greece in 2016 via the Eastern Mediterranean route. However, by the time the LIBE Committee's own initiative report on the situation in the Mediterranean and a holistic approach to migration was adopted by the European Parliament's plenary on 12 April 2016, a new dynamic was beginning to play out, with 10,541 people arriving in April 2016 compared to 29,864 in April 2015. One possible explanation is the implementation on 20 March 2016 of the EU-Turkey Statement adopted on 18 March 2016 between the European Council and Turkey.”²

¹ The information in this report is based on developments until the time of the mission.

² See background document provided for the delegation visit by the Policy Department.

While the numbers of new arrivals in Greece dropped, the **number of asylum procedures increased dramatically** because of the closed border with FYROM. It is estimated that 54.000 asylum seekers are presently in Greece but many of them had not been registered until the time of the delegation visit. The Greek asylum service has capacity problems due to the severe limitations to hire new civil servants under the memorandum. is in the phase of slowly trying to enhance its capacity but in view of the dramatic increase of applications (as an indication, the service was so far able to process 15,000 applications per year, while only in 2 days after the EU-Turkey statement it received 6,000 applications), it is still unable to cope with such a number of asylum seekers.

The EU-Turkey statement marked a dividing line in the treatment of persons arriving to Greece from the Turkish coasts, notably via the adoption of the abovementioned new Greek legislation, law no 4375/2016¹. The task of the Greek asylum service is thus distinct for each category, namely those who arrived after the 20th March and those who arrived beforehand:

1. For the persons who are present on the **islands/hotspots** (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos), estimated at some 8,000 at the time of the mission, Greece has to register asylum seekers and send back to Turkey those who do not apply for asylum or those whose application is deemed inadmissible. The admissibility checks result in a decision of the Greek Asylum Service after individual interviews – carried out by EASO-experts, which examine whether an asylum seeker can put forward grounds that prove that he/she will not be safe in Turkey when returned. These grounds could be manifold, reaching from a personal history of persecution in Turkey to specific characteristics of the applicant which could expose him/her in particular to specific unsafety in Turkey. Applicants able to claim family reunification under the Dublin regulation (Dublin cases) or vulnerable applicants are exempted from the admissibility procedure and will be further processed according to the asylum legislation in Greece.

According to the information received, about 60% of the applicants could put forward, at the stage of first instance, individual reasons resulting in unsafety in case of return to Turkey. These applicants got access to the normal Greek asylum procedure. Applicants declared inadmissible and therefore to be returned to Turkey can lodge an appeal with an Appeals Board. At the time of the mission there were informal reports that some first instance decisions declaring the applications inadmissible had been overruled with the effect that the applicants cannot be returned to Turkey but will enter the normal Greek asylum procedure. EASO assists the Greek authorities with the individual interviews during the admissibility procedure in the hotspots, usually carrying interviews without the presence of a Greek officer due to the understaffing of the Greek asylum service, but the final decisions are taken by the Greek authorities. Returns are carried out in joint operations of Frontex and the Greek authorities. By 20 May, when the mission ended, 441 persons had been returned to Turkey since the 20th March.

The IOM runs a voluntary return programme in Greece.

¹ See unofficial translation in English, commissioned by UNHCR: http://asylo.gov.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GREECE_Law_4375_2016_EN_final.pdf

2. Most refugees who arrived before 20 March on the islands were brought to camps on the **mainland**.

There are many camps all over Greece run by the Greek authorities (and one by UNHCR), with 38,000 places at the time of the visit, and a planning, according to the government, for another 20,000 places to be made available till mid June. There are also makeshift camps of which the biggest could be found in Idomeni at the Greece/FYROM border and in Piraeus.

Different types of official camps could be found across Greece ranging from military camp buildings, or other public buildings, to tents. Conditions therefore necessarily differ, but generally official camps provide basic shelter and food but do not represent a long-term reception solution and in certain cases do not meet European reception standards and food/hygiene have been reported to be an issue. UNHCR as well as a range of local and international non-governmental organisations provide different services in those camps, such as food but also water and sanitation services, legal protection, special services for children and women, and emergency health services. Refugees in the makeshift camps are supported by UNHCR, Greek and international organisations, and volunteers, who provide similar services as the one listed for official camps, but in a smaller scale and under much more strained conditions. Mainly food provision seems to work quite well. The challenge for the Greek authorities is convincing the refugees to move to official camps in order to avoid unstructured shelters with high risk of criminality. At the time of the delegation visit, a pre-registration exercise was in the making in cooperation with the Greek Asylum Service, UNHCR and EASO in order to map all applicants for international protection on the mainland and to have three groups identified: the candidates for relocation, for Dublin family reunification and for the Greek asylum procedure. Candidates for relocation, once their relocation decision is registered, will be hosted in specific camps in order to facilitate the further procedure.

Both tasks, on the islands and on the mainland, are hampered on the one hand by **information deficits** of asylum seekers on the procedure to be followed, additionally confused by false information provided by smugglers and traffickers. Following the EU Turkey statement, the change in procedures has brought additional challenges in this regard. Asylum seekers consequently have no trust in the Greek asylum procedure and it takes time to convince them to cooperate.

On the other hand, there are **capacity problems**. Compared to the number of asylum seekers, the Greek Asylum Service does not have sufficient staff to process the applications in a short timeframe. Taking interviews from persons seeking international protection needs quite particular professional experience, not only on how such interviews have to be carried out, how vulnerable persons can be identified and documents can be verified, but also on the Greek Asylum law which is applicable. EASO provides for comprehensive training to its experts deployed and its support has substantially increased the output of the cases registered for relocation. The Greek Asylum Service might be allowed to hire new staff in the future and EASO looks into other possible ways to support the Asylum Service, as the ordinary asylum procedure remains too slow compared to the urgent needs of the refugees, given also the

resources, including EASO ones, currently allocated to the fast track procedure under the EU-Turkey statement.

Relocation of asylum seekers from Greece went quite slowly for different reasons, such as the initial low number of registered asylum seekers in Greece, the lengthy procedures, including security checks applied by the Member States and the lack of sufficient pledges by Member States. IOM is responsible for the transfers of relocation candidates once Member States have accepted their application.

III. Summary of the meetings and visits

17 May 2016 – Thessaloniki

Preparatory meeting with Yiannis MOUZALAS, Alternate Minister of Migration Policy, Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Mariya GABRIEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Róza Gräfin VON THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT

The Minister deplored the long delays and capacity problems so far in the process of relocation. He set out the difficult situation of Greece, being normally a transit country for refugees, and the relevance of the EU-Turkey statement for an improvement of the situation in Greece. While he acknowledged that the statement had a potential to violate human rights, it also provided for a legal way for Syrians from Turkey to the EU through resettlement. He announced that the makeshift camp in Idomeni, which was the result of a unilateral decision to close the border, would be progressively evacuated within the next weeks to transfer people to official camps with better reception conditions and management of the procedures.

He acknowledged that the conditions in the camps should be improved and stressed the government's efforts to this effect, indeed in view of the need for people to remain for longer periods in Greece, notably in view of the situation after the EU-Turkey statement and the severe delays in the relocation process. He referred to the Dublin regulation by saying that these were the problems experienced by a country of first entry.

He admitted that the situation in the Hotspots was not good because of overcrowding but would improve with the progressive implementation the EU-Turkey statement. He took the view that Hotspots had in any case been conceived as closed centres save that the duration of the detention used to be shorter (72 hours) than at present (25 days). Refugees are kept there for registration purposes and the eventual re-admission procedure. They are informed about their rights and obligations.

Before the conclusion of the EU-Turkey statement, only 1% to 3% of the refugees arriving on the islands asked for asylum, now almost all of them do. According to the new Greek Asylum Law, the procedure takes at least 15 days. He underlined that this was in line with international law.

He pointed out that many of the refugees arriving on the islands were vulnerable: Unaccompanied minors, people with disabilities, pregnant women.

Regarding unaccompanied minors, he informed that Greece had 700 accommodation places for them but 300 were still without shelter. He said that Greek authorities were in discussion with NGOs to finalise plans until the end of June for 1000 additional places for unaccompanied minors. At this occasion, he mentioned that the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants had issued a report on the situation of asylum seekers in Greece.

The Minister also underlined the support and good cooperation with European Union agencies like EASO and Frontex. Greece received funds from the EU for the measures in the area of migration but the procedures were very cumbersome. He found it unfortunate that a large amount of funds for humanitarian aid went directly to international organisations. Greek authorities were nonetheless thankful for the support of these organisations and kept good cooperation relations with them. In the context of the crisis, Greek authorities made available food and public health services, as well as deploying police and coast guards despite the economic crisis. He underlined his hope that the EU-Turkey statement could provide for a viable solution for the future.

During the discussion, some Members underlined the need for European solutions based on solidarity. Others agreed with the Minister's views on the need for a functioning EU-Turkey statement and shared his fears in case this did not materialise. It was also discussed whether more information of asylum seekers could help to enhance the procedures. The Minister stressed among others that more support from EASO was needed.

18 May 2016 – Polykastro /Idomeni

Meeting with UNHCR, NGOs and volunteers active in the informal camps at the Northern Border (mainly Idomeni)

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Mariya GABRIEL, Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT

The UNHCR informed that the Greek government had set up a **humanitarian aid co-ordination system** for the North of Greece, where the plan is to host 30,000 refugees.

At the informal camps around the northern border, notably Idomeni the overall coordination is done by UNHCR, and there is a system of teams consisting of organisations working in the same sector. The following NGOs active in the camps participated in the exchange of views with the Members:

- *International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Regional Office*
IOM supports the Greek government with voluntary returns and in the relocation process (i.e. health assessment, flight booking and escorting asylum seekers to their country of destination). They were planning projects on better information of refugees and improvement of accommodation as well as surveys on trafficking.
- *Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)*

MSF has a very long presence supporting refugees by providing medical and psychological support, shelter and sanitation, food and non-food distribution. On the international level, MSF had just started an advocacy campaign to remind the EU of the requirements of the Geneva Convention.

- *Praxis*
This Greek NGO works in Idomeni on food and non-food (hygiene/baby items), interpretation and psychological support.
- *Boat Refugee Foundation*
This Dutch NGO just started to work in the unofficial camps, formerly being on the Greek islands; they provide food especially to children and co-operate with “Save the Children”
- *Save the Children*
This international NGO has many offices in Greece working for the well-being of children but also mothers and their children. Their support included the provision of non-formal education.
- *Samaritans’ purse*
This US NGO is working on hygiene and food distribution.
- *Oikopolis*
This ecological community provides food and non-food; they are cooking out on the field. To this end, they co-ordinate with many organisations and form a platform for volunteers.
- *The independent volunteers support team - “Hotmeal Idomeni”*
Guides independent volunteers to find the existing project which suits them most. For the moment this concerns mostly the provision of food. They provide 6000 to 7000 meals per day.
- *Terre des Hommes*
This international NGO co-operates with Arsis, a local Greek NGO, on child protection projects and provides food and non-food items as well as internet access.
- *Arsis*
This Greek NGO works on child protection and provides child friendly spaces and psychological support as well as protection of unaccompanied minors.
- *The Hellenic Red Cross*
It is active in different camps where they provide psychological support and food and non-food items. Additionally, in Idomeni, they provide health assistance and child support.
- Spanish volunteer organisation (firefighters from Sevilla)
It provides gas for cooking, milk and food.

UNHCR's main task was to assist and co-ordinate the various actors and to provide information on procedures for international protection as well as convincing people to move to the official camps. UNHCR also assisted with transfers from Idomeni to other sites.

During the discussion, following questions by Members, UNHCR admitted that co-ordination was challenging but they also experienced an **enormous solidarity** of the local population and the volunteers. This was experienced as a unique phenomenon of European solidarity with refugees.

Two main **challenges** were mentioned:

1. Reception capacity needed urgent improvements to comply with European standards, notably respect for human dignity.
2. Legal alternatives were also urgently needed, including access to the asylum procedure, family reunification under the Dublin Regulation, and relocation. Many women with their children were awaiting family reunification with their husbands who resided legally in another Member State. Attention was drawn to the fact that most refugees in Idomeni were women and children.

It was admitted that these alternatives depended from cooperation with other European countries.

IOM runs a **voluntary return** programme since 6 years. The number of requests had increased exponentially since the start of the crisis, notably of Moroccans and Iranians, but also Afghans and Iraqis since the closure of the border. It was also said that according to a survey, 1 in 10 migrants had been approached by traffickers.

“Save the Children” noted that 1 out of 20 persons in Idomeni are **unaccompanied minors**. There are deficiencies in the Greek legal regime on such minors. In principle, the General Prosecutor would be their legal guardian but now they are kept in detention because of the lack of shelter arrangements. Relocation of unaccompanied minors, and also family reunification should be fast-tracked because they run serious risks. Minors, including those with disabilities, have difficulties to access relevant services including health care and education. Although Greek authorities plan to include children in formal education from September 2016 onwards, public school capacity remains a challenge.

During the discussion it was also mentioned that better reception facilities were needed to attract refugees to the official camps as well as improved **information** on the asylum, relocation and family reunification procedures. In addition, the impossibility to access the asylum system through Skype was identified as a key factor of frustration and mistrust. UNHCR and NGOs identified therefore the need for a functioning asylum system in order for trust to be built up so that the refugees would be convinced to go through the asylum and possible relocation procedure..

Visit of the makeshift camp of Idomeni

After the Round Table discussion, Members left divided in two groups for security reasons for the **visit of the makeshift camp of Idomeni** where the Head of Delegation provided for a

number of interviews to a large group of interested media representatives. Members had the opportunity to talk to refugees thanks to the presence of Arabic interpreters and were informed by representatives of MSF, the International Rescue Committee (IRC - Safe Space for Women) and Arsis (Greek NGOs offering projects for children) about their work in the camp.

19 May 2016 – Lesbos

Meeting with Frontex representative on the operational work of the agency on the Greek islands in the presence of the Commission representative Mr Nicolas KATRAKASAS

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Mariya GABRIEL, Laura FERRARA, Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT, Elissavet VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI

Francisco RAMOS, operational officer, gave a general overview of the situation:

While the number of refugees arriving in Greece is decreasing, the percentage of vulnerable cases isn't. The **Poseidon rapid intervention** was launched on the 28th of December of 2015 to assist Greece in the management of an exceptional migration crisis at the external borders. This meant that Frontex supported the Greek authorities by deploying aerial, naval and land assets to patrol external borders and Human resources to support in identification and registration, by deploying screening, fingerprinting, registration, documents experts and interpreters.

Since 20 March 2016, Frontex supported also the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, including readmission operations to Turkey. Escort officers of Frontex have supported Greece so far with **few readmission activities** to Turkey. In addition Frontex supports Greece, as all other EU Member States in organising and coordinating return flights of migrants from the EU towards third countries.

Approximately more than 350 **staff** members in total were working on the islands. Out of them, 210 officers participated in border surveillance and debriefing, screening, fingerprinting, document checks and interpretation, the rest in readmission activity. Frontex organizes and co-finances deployments of Guest Officers and Seconded Guest Officers from Member States to the operational areas of JO. To this end, it publishes calls indicating the number of experts needed per profile, period and location, while the MS are offering the pledges. Not all the time all resources need could be covered.

To carry out its operations, Frontex received different assets, in particular aircrafts, helicopters, vessels, patrol cars, and thermos vision vans, from other Member States. However, the **equipment** is not always corresponding to the respective needs on the ground. As Frontex works in a reactive manner, there are situations of temporary shortages or short periods of over-equipment compared to the situation.

Frontex roles and tasks

Frontex supports Hellenic authorities with aerial and maritime assets for **the interception of boats and rescues at sea**. This implied that Frontex crew members were effectively rescuing about 70% of all rescued migrants during the Rapid Intervention, thus saving thousands of human lives.

One of the tasks is the *debriefing of migrants*. The **debriefing** serves to receive information from migrants about their trip towards Europe. Migrants inform Frontex representatives in anonymous interviews about the reason why they left their home countries, how they arranged the trip, with whom they travelled, their plans on how to continue their journey, etc. The objective is to gain intelligence about the phenomenon of smuggling and the criminal networks behind it. Interviews are not taking place with minors.

Besides, Frontex assists in screenings to support **identification of the nationality** of a migrant. For this task, there is support of interpreters who can be used for example to assess accents. Frontex passes on this information to the Greek authorities. When documents are available, Frontex also has document experts who check the travel documents on their authenticity.

Arresting **smugglers** is difficult. They are very well informed about what is going on and try to adapt their modus operandi to avoid measures taken by border guards. There are two identified modus operandi at the moment, one being rubber boats with no smugglers on board and the other one more costly i.e; rapid speed boats with a smuggler, usually Turkish, that would leave the people on the shores or close to them and return quickly to Turkey.

Fingerprints of minors over 14 years old are taken only by the First Reception Service carried out by the Greek authorities, no police is present when this happens.

Regarding the **cooperation with Turkey**, more involvement of Turkish authorities has been observed since the EU-Turkey Statement. More generally speaking of the cooperation with third countries, it should be noted that Frontex has a unit for relations with third countries for the purposes of the mandate of the agency. The aim is to have frequent contacts for better results and a better support to the Member States.

Mr KATRAKASAS from the European Commission also intervened, replying to a question from a Member, on the composition of groups coming from Turkey after the deal, saying that fewer arrivals were indeed noted, but with a higher percentage of vulnerable persons. He specified that three representatives of the European Commission were present on the Greek islands.

Visit of the Hotspot of Moria

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Mariya GABRIEL, Laura FERRARA, Janice ATKINSON

Due to security concerns only the Head of Delegation and five Members could visit the Hotspot.

Meeting with representatives of EASO, FRA, the General Secretary of the Aegean and Islands Policy and the Commission representative, Nicolas KATRAKASAS

Participants: Malin BJORK, Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT, Elissavet VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI, later joined by the Members who visited the Hotspot

The representative of **EASO** explained the procedure for those 3.500 having arrived after 20 March 2016 and still on the island. For applicants, the asylum procedure starts the admission procedure in the Hotspot. The admissibility procedure includes a case by case screening if a person can be sent back to Turkey which depends on what would be his/her situation in Turkey. Such interviews take 3-4 hours, as interviewers also examine possible vulnerability in accordance with the new Greek asylum law. All vulnerable persons, including unaccompanied minors are exempted from the admissibility procedure. EASO-experts do the interviews and the Greek Asylum Services establishes their decisions afterwards on this basis. Finally it has to be noted that after 25 days, asylum seekers can move around on the island during daylight with a permission paper.

By 19 May 2016, 400 interviews were carried out in the context of the admissibility procedure. There are **many admissible cases found**, or cases exempted from the admissibility procedure because of family reunification cases in accordance with the Dublin Regulation, or because of vulnerability in accordance with Greek asylum law; and finally, an additional reason is that there were issues with arrivals on the cutting days (18-20 March)¹. All those who were declared admissible in first instance have appealed. According to Greek law the Appeals Boards consist of a Greek civil servant (as a Chair), one member appointed by UNHCR and one member appointed from the list established by the Greek National Commission of Human Rights.

Regarding **certain nationalities**: applications by Palestinians from Syria are presently on hold for the time it takes to clarify whether they are safe in Turkey. The safety of Syrian Kurds in Turkey is examined on a case-by-case basis. EASO experts have very long experience on Syria to allow them to make informed assessments. .

EASO had 60 experts² at the time of the mission, coming from other Member States to assist Greece with the interviews in Chios, Lesbos, and Samos. For these interviews, EASO needs different profiles of experts, among which team leaders, vulnerability experts, experts for the organisation of the procedure and in high numbers, interviewers. For these skilled and experienced **qualified experts**, EASO launches application procedures for national experts from national administrations, who will be deployed for a period of time to EASO. If

¹ It has to be noted that different rules apply for refugees arriving after and before 20 March, the day on which the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement started. Some of the refugees, however, who arrived before 20 March were processed in accordance with the procedures to be followed after 20 March.

² 66 at the moment of the drafting of the report it was also mentioned that there were 60 interpreters.

deployed, the experts continue to be paid by their Member State while also receiving a daily allowance from EASO. They receive a basic training at the start, which is called “pre-deployment training”. They have to understand the Greek asylum law and the procedures and hear about lessons learnt and best practices. In this training, fundamental rights training is included, which facilitates the understanding of the new Greek asylum law. In addition, there is on-the-job training, sometimes also in week-ends. Consequently, interviews have a proper quality. It should also be noted that deployment of EASO experts also depends on availability of Greek asylum service officials, since each team of 4-5 EASO experts has to be accompanied by 1 Greek expert.

The representative of **FRA** presented the work of the agency since April 2016 on the Greek islands (with 1 expert): as also in other contexts, FRA provides fundamental rights advice to agencies and European institutions. To this end, FRA has a bilateral cooperation with Frontex (in relation to returns and the monitoring of returns) and EASO regarding the operational level in the hotspots. Besides, based on the experiences on the ground, FRA prepares weekly notes to the Executive Director and other European institutions to assist them in their work. FRA offers awareness raising including training in respect for fundamental rights in the hotspot context directed to EU agencies and institutions but also the local bar association. FRA offers de-escalation measures to mitigate security risks in the camps, for example on how to communicate positively to minimise the risk of tensions. FRA promotes cooperation with civil society organisations and acts as a facilitator. On the issue of **unaccompanied minors**. It has also produced a child protection video. FRA pointed out that **better information to asylum seekers** was needed and should be communicated more proactively.

More generally, the situation of **unaccompanied minors** on Lesbos was also discussed. FRA noted the dire effects of detention including physical and psychological effects. About 200 were hosted in a closed area in the Hotspot, to protect them, including against traffickers, which means also that they are not allowed to exit the hotspot not even after 25 days. FRA, however, pointed that the situation is improving with the transfer of 70 unaccompanied minors from Moria to a newly set camp in Mandamados. Further, the plan was to evacuate swiftly the remaining ones and accommodate them in additional facilities or even apartments outside the hotspot. In the Moria hotspot, capacities are very limited and therefore few activities are offered to them. The lack of alternatives to detention was due to the insufficient capacities to receive them on the mainland in appropriate shelters. Legal guardianship belongs, according to Greek law, to the local public prosecutor. However, issues are evolving and FRA is taking active steps to bring all competent Greek services together to discuss ways forward to the current lack of alternatives to detention also on the basis of other Member States’ experiences. Furthermore, it was pointed out that schooling, starting from September 2016, remains a problem. Integration projects were needed with the support from the EU.

FRA proposed to move a step further regarding the promotion of human rights through the agencies active in Greece. There is potential for a positive cooperation to integrate the spirit of fundamental rights in the work of the agencies. This is not about additional work for the staff of the agencies but to contribute to lifting existing standards.

Nicolas KATRAKASAS, representative of the Commission’s unit on Hotspots on Lesbos, presented the work of **Europol** that is present in Greece since April 2016 with at least 2 agents per island (hotspot) on a rotation scheme (4 agents are assigned to Lesbos but unavailable due to their rotation on that day). They provide access of Greek authorities to

Europol databases in addition to PolNet to allow for secondary security checks, if there are suspicions after first checks (carried out by FRONTEX and Greek Police). Europol has a new team in Den Haag dedicated to migration with 200 staff members in Greece. It assists Greece with investigations into smuggling.

Mr Giannis GIANELLIS, the **General Secretary of the Aegean and Islands Policy** welcomed the European Parliament Members. He reported that in 2015, every day thousands of refugees arrived in Lesbos. He thanked the NGOs and UNHCR for their immense assistance. He is the responsible person to promote and facilitate their meetings. The NGOs with whom cooperation existed have been registered, presently 57 NGOs with 2100 volunteers. He admitted that the number of refugees had declined substantially. Nikos KATRAKASAS added that also the EU institutions have regular coordination meetings.

It was mentioned that the entry restrictions to the camps and the hotspot were related to security issues related to the capacity problems.

Upon requests of MEPs, it was explained that the overall **situation in the camps was not good** but that there were many initiatives to improve the situation but they are not always visible on the ground. The Commission had asked the Greek authorities to appoint a coordinator per camp to ensure the coordination of all actors (at the moment only Moria has a coordinator). This request has been taken care of. However, they often commute to Athens, and are therefore not constantly present on the island, although reachable by phone. It had to be noted that there was a lack of resources in all authorities.

Lunch with the Mayor of Lesbos

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Mariya GABRIEL, Laura FERRARA, Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT, Elissavet VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI

The Mayor presented the situation in Lesbos with many refugees, the need to fight the root causes of the refugee crisis, provide shelter for refugees, and the challenges linked to the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement. The EP Head of Delegation thanked for the invitation and the possibility to visit the island and to see the situation related with the refugee crisis for which a solution needed to be found in co-operation with all stakeholders.

Visit of the camp Kara Tepe

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Mariya GABRIEL, Laura FERRARA, Roza Graefin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT, Elissavet VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI

Kara Tepe is a camp for vulnerable refugees, which is not run by the Greek authorities but by the municipality of Lesvos.

Visit with the camp coordinator

The camp coordinator set out the functioning of the camp. He underlined the need to receive the refugees (in Kara Tepe they are called “guests”) in dignity.

The camp consists of different neighbourhoods according to the different nationalities living in the camp. Acceptance of the multicultural community in the camp was a precondition for the stay in the camp.

The coordinator set out that he has prepared different scenarios regarding the capacity of the camp to be able to react quickly to changing situations. Presently, the camp counted 1000 “guests”.

The camp has separated bathrooms organised by NGOs as well as playground for children and some refugees have set up a garden or schools (language classes exist for EN, FR, GR). There is a daily programme, including free time entertainment (e.g. barbecues).

Meeting with UNHCR and IRC

UNHCR explained that there had been claims of discrimination after the EU-Turkey statement as it provides priority treatment for Syrians while other nationalities are partly very vulnerable. Consequently, protection of minorities was needed.

Besides, the great majority of “guests” were vulnerable persons: unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, refugees with disabilities and post traumatic stress disorder, female headed households, families with young children, some with disabilities, torture victims. Due to the long stay in the camps and uncertainty about their future, refugees develop psychological disorders. Children should go to school and have a more stable life.

It was explained that the UNHCR WASH-team addressed hygiene issues, including HIV.

The Protection Officer set out that from her experience with profiling, identification, referral to services and legal services, she could confirm that more than 90% of the “guests” were recognised as vulnerable. The problem with Dublin family reunification cases was raised.

Besides, it was set out that the pre-registration took place on the island while asylum seekers had to go to Athens for the interview. For the interview, applicants received an asylum booklet with the date of the interview in Athens. However, not all applicants have money to pay the journey to Athens and UNHCR has to collect funds. UNHCR is also monitoring the boarding to ensure that those who are entitled can actually travel.

Also generally speaking, not having cash is a big issue and can lead to negative behaviour to cope with the shortage, like prostitution or theft. Besides, in Athens, applicants don't know where to go and some came back after the interview. She mentioned that cash assistance schemes were already well functioning in camps in Lebanon or Jordan.

Discussion with EASO representative on next steps in Greece

The EASO representative set out that still in May a big exercise to pre-register applicants by mobile teams was planned. This concerned only those applicants who arrived before the EU-Turkey deal. In this pre-registration phase, EASO will provide additional support to identify vulnerable groups, and the aim is to map the applicant population into three groups: those who fall under the family reunification provisions of the Dublin Regulation, the applicants for relocation and the applicants under the Greek asylum procedure. However, registration can only happen in structured camps, not in makeshift camps like Idomeni. Consequently, the camps should be evacuated. Regarding the persons coming out of the admissibility procedure with the view to enter the Greek asylum procedure, once they are brought to the main land they might have access to relocation.

A Yazidi refugee coming from Iraq set out his personal story and asked for support as he had family members in another Member State.

Some members of the delegations with the assistance of an Arabic interpreter spoke to several refugees from Iraq and Syria present in the camp who also presented their cases. The vast majority were single women with very small children whose husband was already living in another EU Member States or families with already minor children in an EU Member State, therefore all Dublin cases. Their main questions were related to their fear of possible return to Turkey, the length of family reunification processes and the absence of cash assistance, including for the ferry ticket to go to the mainland for their interviews.

Meeting with UNHCR

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Mariya GABRIEL, Laura FERRARA, Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT, Elissavet VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI

Giovanni LEPRI, Department Representative of the UNHCR Office in Athens, explained that UNHCR opened their first office worldwide 1952 in Greece. Their work increased exponentially since last year due to the arrival of large numbers of refugees and migrants needed an urgent response. Since the EU-Turkey statement, the situation on the islands was increasingly worrying because the immediate needs were not met. The upcoming tasks were providing asylum seekers with documentation and access to the asylum procedure. From the perspective of UNHCR, 50000 refugees should not be a crisis but a responsibility. However, the situation was complex. The Greek authorities needed to make a **suitable structure of reception centres** available so that the refugees would want to move there voluntarily. It had to be taken into account that when the standard does not fit, people will leave again. For a stay of a few months, a basic standard was sufficient to make a family comfortable. This needed to happen quite quickly because the longer people stay at one place the more difficult the move will be. UNHCR is experienced in this respect and is in contact with the Greek government to this end.

The situation of **Iraqis** was particularly precarious and relocation should be kept available for them.

Besides, the situation of young male **unaccompanied minors** needed to be addressed and they had to be provided with more adapted accommodation and receive proper services and

care. The commitment of Greece was huge but implementation of such projects was more difficult. To meet the rising tensions in the camps it was necessary to lower the suffering and to improve the process. The unaccompanied minors in Moria should have access to education but they are in detention because they wait for a structure that can receive them. Their integration depends on a larger strategy for integration of migrants in Greece.

Nicole EPTING, Head of the UNHCR office in Lesbos, informed that **60% of all arrivals throughout Europe** came through the Greek island. The population there had been very welcoming. The main nationalities were Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghanis. UNHCR had 60 staff members on the islands for presently nearly 8,000 refugees (of which 4,000 in Lesbos).

More particularly, the **tasks of UNHCR** included lifesaving at the shore, protection work, and assistance. Regarding the Hotspot, UNHCR was present for monitoring and counselling on rights and obligations. But since the EU-Turkey statement they were no longer involved in the asylum procedures because of the UNHCR principles with regard to detention of asylum seekers. The following services have stopped: Transport to the hotspot and infrastructure support. But the fact that more than 800 vulnerable persons were moved out of Moria and that after the lapse of 25 days people were allowed to go out during the day was seen as a positive sign and a readjustment of UNHCR policy was not excluded. UNHCR had received funds for their work in the hotspots and camps. Most of its tasks are still carried out as long as Greece and the European Union want UNHCR to continue. These tasks include direct humanitarian assistance.

UNHCR took also care of **vulnerable groups** (in Kara Tepe more than 90%, while in normal circumstances this group represents 30%) and made efforts to **protect women and girls** from sexual and gender based violence. To this end, there are gender based violence response projects and a community based approach to prevention; women safe spaces were created, for example in Kara Tepe by IRC. In principle, women should be received in alternative accommodation centres. UNHCR organises trust building activities for women to talk and to identify cases of gender based violence (this is also happening in the hotspot), take interviews and provide medical service.

UNHCR cooperates with the 700 NGOs on the island who run facilities. They support the authorities in their cooperation with the NGOs. There are several Working Groups, such as for instance the Sector Working Group (food, health, etc issues), the Protection Working Group (actors working on the asylum procedure) and the Inter-Agency-Forum.

Legal aid during the first instance phase is not yet available- UNHCR has very limited staff present in Moria who can provide some information on the procedure. As a result, people have only access to legal aid and thus proper legal advice after their requests have been deemed inadmissible in line with existing EU legislation and national law. There are a number of projects, for example a partnership with the Greek Refugee Council to provide legal aid against refusal and detention of minors. There are funds available to finance legal aid but their deployment on the ground is taking too long. There are trainings for lawyers and NGOs, while more generally the capacity of the Bar associations should be improved as the current situation is legally very complex.

Some accommodation with cash and voucher systems had been put in place in Athens and Thessaloniki by NGOs but there are sustainability issues, as funding has not been secured in

the long term.

Informal and interactive meeting with local NGOs in Lesvos

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Laura FERRARA, Roza Graefin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT

Different issues were discussed by Members in their informal exchanges with the NGOs present. For instance, MSF highlighted three main issues as a result of the closure of the hotspots and people having to remain on the islands:

- Increase of gender-based violence;
- Increase of prostitution;
- Increase of self-harm cases.

MSF shared also information on their new pilot project on provision of legal aid in coordination with other actors.

Doctors of the World shared information on the medical situation of refugees currently on the island and raised the issue of people with severe health problems like cancer and impossibility to access adequate treatment on the island.

Save the Children noted seeing protests on an almost daily basis in the camps in across Greece. Refugees and migrants have been stranded in Greece for up to three months living in deplorable conditions. They also have very little information about their future and how long they will be in Greece and this is contributing to the increase in tensions. Save the Children has talked to families who are extremely afraid and won't leave their tents because they are worried about getting caught up in the violence. Some mothers have said their children cry every night in their tents. Save the Children is very concerned about the safety of children and their families in the hotspots on the islands and calls on authorities to provide them with the safety and protection they desperately need.

Athens

20 May 2016

Additional informal meeting on legal information and assistance

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Laura FERRARA, Janice ATKINSON

Yunous MUHAMMADI, Greek Forum of Refugees, Francisca BAPTISTA DA SILVA, MSF Elena KOUTRA, Lawyer and Chair of the Action for Human Rights, and Eleni Velivasaki, Proasyl, took the floor to draw attention to the fact that applications via Skype did not work. Besides, there was no information available, which increased the likelihood of refugees to resort to smugglers. It was worrying that in these circumstances, no practical legal aid was available until the appeals stage. Representation in terms of legal support was essential because of the difficult and changing procedures which made professional aid indispensable. Representatives drew attention to the fact that the new asylum law provided for the competence of the Minister to transform open camps into closed camps overnight. It was

proposed giving unaccompanied minors and women and children the possibility to join their male family members living in other Member States during a given timeframe, for example until September, through Member States' embassies in Greece.

Meeting with the General Secretary for Migration

Vassilis PAPADOPOULOS

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Laura Ferrara, Janice ATKINSON

The General Secretary works under the Minister Mouzalas. He set out that the **structure and character of the reception centres/hotspots** needed to change after the EU-Turkey statement. They should provide basic services and protect unaccompanied minors. He underlined the government's efforts to improve the situation, among others through the cooperation with NGOs. The main short term objective was to transfer all refugees into official camps to have them registered, for processing their asylum applications, including requests for relocation or carrying out returns. The pre-registration will need about 2 months. Information on the procedures will be provided.

Regarding the **funding** from the EU, he stated that 500 Mio Euros were available for Greece under the present MFF and Greece had already received parts of these funds for reception and returns. He also mentioned the newly created Emergency fund out of which no large funds had been received by the humanitarian aid organisations yet. Besides, the funding out of the civil protection fund of 83 Mio Euros was spent through DG ECHO to NGOs and national partners. These funds start to be invested on the ground.

Regarding the **support by EASO**, he set out that experts able to carry out interviews in the framework of asylum applications needed to have a larger set of qualifications than Frontex officers. Therefore, their selection was more complicated and time consuming. However, the staffing of the Greek asylum service in parallel with increased support from EASO was on-going. Greece used the European Social Fund (ESF) in order to hire unemployed people for working in the immigration services and in the municipalities to assist with refugee reception.

Besides, he was aware of the problems with the Skype applications and that this might cause further backlog regarding the processing of **applications** on the short term. Applications for relocation and family reunification were a priority and should be finalised quickly. Furthermore, the government was working to improve accommodation facilities, also with regard to the reception of unaccompanied minors and the provision of better legal aid, at least for the second instance of the asylum procedures.

Regarding the **integration** of refugees he mentioned that following the new law of last month asylum seekers had the right of access to the labour market and integration courses are provided. He stated that under EU funding, reception was a priority, not integration. He stated that mainly education was a challenge, but that language courses, not only for Greek, were provided. Greece made an effort to identify the qualifications of the asylum seekers to assist them in the labour market integration (please see overview of EU funding to Greece in the annex).

Finally, he stated that the Greek government was reluctant regarding the proposal for the recast of the **Dublin** regulation as Greece was a first entry country that needed a stable and proper mechanism of solidarity.

Press Conference

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Mariya GABRIEL, Laura FERRARA, Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT, Elissavet VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI

Meeting at the Hellenic Parliament

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Birgit SIPPEL, Helga STEVENS, Malin BJORK, Laura FERRARA, Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Janice ATKINSON, Anna Maria CORAZZA-BILDT

The Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Anastasios KOURAKIS, and the Chair of the Committee on Public Administration, Public Order and Justice, Antonios SYRIGOS, welcomed the delegation and gave the floor to the Chair of the Committee on National Defence and Foreign Affairs, Konstantinos DOUZINAS who pointed to the present discussion in the Hellenic Parliament about new austerity measures.

Nikolaos XIDAKIS, Alternate Minister for Foreign Affairs, participated in the discussion. Members of all political groups in the Greek Parliament took the floor. They welcomed the opportunity for discussions with MEPs. Different views on the crisis and possible solutions were put forward. While some underlined the need for cooperation on the European level for a more favourable reception of refugees through resettlement programmes and responsibility sharing through a renewed Dublin convention, others stressed the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement as a way to achieve a better management of migration flows despite its shortcomings. There were also Members who referred to the competence and responsibility of the national authorities for immigration laws and border control. By referring to the economic crisis, some Greek Members called upon European solidarity for an appropriate reaction to the refugee crisis. Many Members underlined the need to put measures in place that provide protection to refugees, notably to vulnerable groups like unaccompanied minors, and prevent them from drowning in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, Members also mentioned that proper border management was needed to ensure security.

Peter NIEDERMÜLLER took the floor on behalf of the delegation to thank the Greek authorities for their support to the delegation visit and the warm welcome in the Greek national parliament. He presented the EP delegation and a summary of the legislative work of the LIBE committee (see Annex).

Working Lunch with Greek Asylum Service and Frontex Office in Greece

Participants: Peter NIEDERMÜLLER (Head of delegation), Róza Gräfin von THUN UND HOHENSTEIN, Maria STRAVOPOULOU (Greek Asylum Service), Grigorios

APOSTOLOU, Head of Frontex Liaison Office.

Maria STAVROPOULOU set out the working of the Greek Asylum Service and the Greek procedures. She explained the differences between applications lodged and applications made. In April 2016, 8000 persons submitted an application, 800 applications were lodged, 570 interviews were carried out and 332 decisions were given. There were 127 appeals (a number which could become higher in the next days, as the deadline was still running). She mentioned the pre-registration process planned to start end of May, which would give people a more concrete horizon and ease current despair. She also noted that the Greek asylum service was recruiting to respond to current needs but this needed time to ensure proper integration of new staff and the consequent quality of the procedures. Indeed the stress on the Greek asylum system was considerable, given that its capacity last year was to process up to 15,000 applications per year, while numbers for 2016 would be neighbouring 50,000 applications. She confirmed that there were many vulnerable and family reunification cases which could not be handled in accelerated procedures at the borders. According to her, the cooperation with EASO works quite well despite the fact that the agency carried out national sovereign tasks. According to her, this was the first step towards a more unified European System.

She also took the view that one European agencies which can take decisions on asylum applications would be premature. However, the role of EASO was important to ensure that the staff of national asylum services had the same knowledge and training.

She also pointed out that the EU -Turkey Statement made their work more difficult in certain fields. An increasing number of migrants (also from Syrian origin) who are stuck in Greece since March would like to choose the voluntary return to Turkey.

Mr APOSTOLOU set out the work of Frontex in Greece as part of the regional task force.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

The numerous visits and exchanges during the mission were considered extremely useful for Members in understanding the current situation of refugees in Greece as well as the contributions of the various actors.

The Members participating in the mission:

- would like to express their gratitude to the Greek government, the UNHCR, EU agencies, local authorities in Lesbos, non-governmental organisations, volunteers and the EP Office in Athens who contributed constructively to the delegation visit and enhanced the understanding of the refugee crisis in Greece;
- recognise the difficult situation in Greece with receiving, registering and processing a high number of, in a majority, vulnerable persons in particular from Syria but also from other countries, like Iraq or Afghanistan, which are hosted by Greece;
- pay tribute to the efforts of Greece and of its citizens to host a large refugee community and to all the governmental, non-governmental actors and volunteers who

assist Greece in providing daily support, setting up suitable reception centres and in organising asylum, family reunification and relocation procedures;

- consider that people will continue to flee their homes if their life and their family are at risk; call therefore upon European and national actors to prepare for the reception of refugees fleeing war and prosecution; also call upon Member States to make competent staff available to EASO, including those specialised in identification and reception of vulnerable groups, in particular regarding guardianship systems for unaccompanied minors;
- call upon Member States to continue their efforts in making pledges and in accelerating the relocation procedure in order to allow for tangible results in responsibility sharing;
- calls upon Member States to fast-track vulnerable Dublin cases to enable them to be reunited with their family as soon as possible and provide adequate material and psychological support in the meantime;
- draw attention to the precarious situation of the refugees remaining outside the official camps which are exacerbated by the fact that they do not allow for proper access to asylum procedures, family reunification, or relocation to other Member States, while forcing refugees to remain longer than necessary in dishonourable living conditions;
- stress in particular that most of the refugees arriving since the beginning of 2016 in Greece belong to vulnerable groups of refugees among which unaccompanied minors, female headed households, and people with disabilities;
- recall the economic crisis continuing in Greece and observe that the financial and staffing support provided from the European level and other Member States to Greece for reception and registration of refugees as well as for carrying out asylum procedures arrives on the ground too slowly and calls for better implementation and coordination;
- are worried that the procedures carried out after the EU-Turkey statement are taking place in closed facilities and take too much time which result in factual detention for at least the first 25 days of the asylum procedure; draws attention to the deteriorating effect of this situation on health and living and working conditions of asylum seekers, officials and volunteers in the hotspots as well as the related increased security risks, and gender-based violence; calls upon all actors to find as quickly as possible alternative solutions while speeding up the procedures through additional staff;
- call upon the European and Greek authorities to shorten the period between lodging a claim for asylum and the actual interview for vulnerable groups in order to allow for speedy family reunification and relocation to other Member States;
- point out that unaccompanied minors should be treated in line with their best interests and durable solutions must urgently be sought for all those currently stranded in Greece; recalls that efforts to achieve this goal should be intensified, including by

establishing alternatives to detention, safeguarding appropriate reception conditions and examining the possibilities of family reunification when it is in the minor's best interest; calls on Greece as well as all concerned Member States to develop their asylum systems with a view to establishing a harmonised and child-sensitive institutional framework that takes into consideration the special needs and diverse difficulties of unaccompanied minors, especially victims of human trafficking;

Annex I

Introductory words of the head of delegation at the Hellenic Parliament on 20/05

Presentation of the delegation:

NIEDERMÜLLER Peter, S&D, HU
SIPPEL Birgit, S&D, DE
STEVENS Helga, ECR, BE
BJORK Malin, GUE, SE
GABRIEL Mariya, EPP, BG
FERRARA Laura, EFDD, IT
THUN UND HOHENSTEIN Róza Maria Gräfin, EPP, PO
ATKINSON Janice, ENF, UK

Accompanying Member:

VOZEMBERG Elissavet, EPP, GR

The delegation has two objectives:

- first, to explore the situation in Greece regarding the handling of the current refugee crisis, and
- a second, but related one, namely the management of EU external borders.

Our Committee, the **Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE committee)**, is responsible for both issues but also for external border control and visa policy, police cooperation, civil and criminal law, and anti-discrimination policy.

In this framework of competences, our committee was at the origin of a very recent European Parliament resolution, on '**The situation in the Mediterranean and a holistic approach to migration**'. In this resolution the European Parliament recommends actions in different migration - related areas, and proposes a European approach to solve the current crisis, based on solidarity and common responsibility. For instance, it recommends a European asylum application system. As such, it would pre-empted in a way the **Communication of the Commission on the Reform of the Common European Asylum System of the beginning of April**.

The competences of the European Parliament are **co-legislation** with the Council, representing the Member States, and **scrutiny** of the European Commission. Besides, the EP is, together with the Council, the **budgetary authority** of the Union.

Accordingly, the LIBE committee is responsible for working on the **legislative proposals** put forward by the European Commission in the areas of **border management** and **migration and asylum** which are, as far as we understood, also part of your field of work.

More concretely, LIBE has been dealing with the legislative proposals presented by the Commission in relation to the **refugee crisis** and the consequent **“crisis” of the Schengen area**. Presently, we are working on the **European Border and Coast Guard draft regulation**, which, among others, should enhance the capacities of Frontex to protect external EU borders in close cooperation with the Member States.

We also discussed intensively with the Commission and Mr Verwey, the coordinator in Greece for its implementation, the so called **EU-Turkey-statement**.

Many actors in the EP have been very critical here about the fact that many of these decisions have been taken on an inter-governmental level **without proper involvement of the democratic institutions** on the European and national level.

As I said, LIBE will be competent for the Commission proposals regarding the **reform of the Common European Asylum System**. As you probably know, the Commission put forward, two weeks ago, initial proposals for adapting our systems to high influx of migrants. It proposes to **amend the Dublin Regulation** in order to enhance solidarity among Member States and to make the procedures faster and better coordinated. Besides, the **European Asylum Support Office, should become a fully fledged European agency**, with special competences to enhance the implementation of the Common European Asylum System. Finally, the **update of the Eurodac Regulation** should facilitate the exchange of data among Member States. In the next months, our Committee will be examining these proposals and come up with a position that would then serve for the negotiation with the Council in co-decision procedures.

We will also give input to the **up-coming second reform package** for amending the qualifications, reception and procedures directives, which will also serve as a basis for the implementation of the future Common European Asylum System.

For all this work, our field visits and exchanges with experts and stakeholders in **Greece** during the last days, have been extremely useful.

We have held discussions with the **alternate Minister Mouzalas**, visited the unofficial camp in **Idomeni**, then visited the hotspot and camp in **Moria**, and the camp in **Kara Tepe**, held discussions with **UNHCR** and humanitarian **NGOs** **EU agencies** working in the field from different perspectives, namely Frontex, EASO and FRA, met with the **Mayor of Lesbos** and the **General Secretary of the Aegean Islands**, and also saw the **General Secretary of the Ministry for Immigration Policy** this morning. We are finally planning to meet with the head of the Greek asylum service today, before heading to Brussels. All these experiences will enlighten our future debates and decision making and strengthen our conviction that European solutions are needed for the refugee crisis.

We are looking forward to use this meeting for an **exchange of views** with you on how you see the next steps forward after the **legislation adopted by the Greek parliament** in April to modify the Greek laws on asylum to **enhance procedures and the cooperation with Turkey**. Our attention had been drawn on the **lack of capacities in Greece for fast procedures** regarding the registration of refugees, and we would be interested to hear your views on this as well as your **expectations to the future European asylum and border management policy**.

Annex II - Final programme

DATE	Time	Activity 1	Interlocutors	Activity 2	Interlocutors	Activity 3	Interlocutors
Tuesday 17 May 2016							
		Arrival in Thessaloniki					
		Proposed flight					
	12.05	Departure Brussels					
	18.55	Arrival Thessaloniki					
	20.00	Preparatory meeting	Venue: Electra Palace Hotel (meeting room on 1st floor)				

DATE	Time	Activity 1	Interlocutors		Activity 2	Interlocutors	
Wednesday, 18 May 2016 AM	08.45	Departure from Hotel Electra Palace (9, Aristotelous Sq., 546 24 Thessaloniki) by bus to the Greece/FYROM border area					
	10.00	Idomeni (2 x 5 persons)	IRC Women's Safe Space	MSF <u>and/or</u> Arsis (protection of children) http://arsis.gr/en/who-we-are/	Meeting with UNHCR/ NGOs (tbc)	UNHCR, Greece Office of UNHCR Thermopilon 10 Polykastro	
	10.30	Walk to the bus and transfer to UNHCR office			Transfer by bus to Idomeni and walk to the site		
	11.00	Meeting with UNHCR/ NGOs	UNHCR, Greece Office of UNHCR Thermopilon 10 Polykastro	Idomeni (2 x 5 persons)	IRC Women's Safe Space	MSF <u>and/or</u> Arsis (protection of children) http://arsis.gr/en/who-we-are/	
	11.30						Walk to the bus and transfer back to UNHCR office
	12.00	Meeting with UNHCR/NGOs (tbc) (full composition of the delegation) at Office of UNHCR, Thermopilon 10, Polykastro					
	12.30	Bus transfer to Diavata					

DATE	Time	Activity 1	Interlocutors	Activity 2	Interlocutors
Wednesday, 18 May 2016 PM	Arrival at Diavata (suburb of Thessaloniki)				
	13.15	Diavata Reception centre (5 MEPs only)	Director of the camp	Lunch meeting with EASO Venue tbc (close to Diavata camp)	EASO representative Other participants tbc Venue tbc (close to Diavata camp)
	13.45	Transfer to the meeting with EASO representative			
	14.15	Meeting with EASO representative on relocation, venue tbc (close to Diavata camp)			
	15.30	Departure from the venue close to Diavat camp (tbc) to the Airport			
	16.00	Arrival at the Airport			
	17.10	Flight A3 541 Thessaloniki to Athens			
	18.30	Dinner at Athens Airport, La Pasteria, Departure Area, 2nd floor			
	20.40	Flight A37258 Athens to Mytilene			
	21.30	Arrival at Mytilene Airport, Lesbos			
	22.00	Departure to the Hotels by bus Heliotrope Hotel , Vigla Varias 81100 Mytilene, Lesbos, Greece Tel: +30 22510 45857, Email: info@heliotrope.gr ; Website: http://www.heliotrope.gr/ Imerti Resort Hotel , Skala Kallonis, Lesbos, Greece Tel: + 30 22530 28028, Fax: + 30 22530 22708, Email: info@imerti.gr , Web: www.imerti.gr			

Date	Time	Activity 1	Inter-locutors	Activity 2	Interlocutors	Activity 3	Interlocutors
Thursday, 19 May 2016 AM, part 1		Check-out from the hotels					
	08.00	Departure from Hotel Imerti, Skala Kallonis to Heliotrope Hotel, Vigla Varias 81100 Mytilene, Lesvos, Greece					
	08.45	Meeting on challenges on rescue at sea and the protection of the EU external border	Frontex representative at Lesvos NATO representative - tbc At Heliotrope hotel, Vigla Varias 81100 Mytilene, Lesvos, Greece				
	09.45	Departure from Heliotrope Hotel to Moria Hotspot and General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy, Mikras Asias 2, 81100 Mytilene					
	10.00	Visit of Moria – Hotspot (5 MEPs only)	Coordinator of the Moria Hotspot EASO	Participation in UNHCR/ NGOs' weekly coordination meeting	UNHCR/NGOs, tbc At: General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy, Mikras Asias 2, 81100 Mytilene (recommendation: no media coverage)	Informal meeting	Commission representative for Hotspots EASO - tbc At General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy, Mikras Asias 2, 81100 Mytilene
	10.50	Transfer from Moria Hotspot to General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy, Mikras Asias 2, 81100 Mytilene.		After the coordination meeting, join the informal meeting			

Date	Time	Activity 1	Inter-locutors	Activity 2	Interlocutors	Activity 3	Interlocutors
	11.00	Meeting with EASO on their future mandate	EASO At General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy, Mikras Asias 2, 81100 Mytilene				
	11.30	Meeting with a representative of FRA on the work of the agency and fundametal rights issues	FRA representative At General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy, Mikras Asias 2, 81100 Mytilene				
	12.00	Meeting on challenges related to the reception and detention of refugees on the island	Representative of Greek Asylum Service - tbc Seconded National Experts - tbc Turkish officials - tbc Europol - tbc At General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy, Mikras Asias 2, 81100 Mytilene				
	13.00	Departure from General Secretariat of Aegean and Island policy for the lunch with the Mayor of Lesbos					

Date	Time	Activity 1	Interlocutors
Thursday, 19 May 2016 PM	13.30	Lunch	Mayor of Lesbos Advisor of the Mayor on Immigration Representative of Greek Police/Coast Guard - tbc Venue tbc
	15.00	Departure for visiting the Open Facility of Kara Tepe	
	15.30	Visit of Kara Tepe site Camp for vulnerable refugees	Coordinator of the facility representative of UNHCR Syrian families EASO
	17.00	Departure for light Dinner with UNHCR	
	17.30	Dinner	Representatives of UNHCR Representative of EASO - tbc Greek NGOs/ stakeholders supporting refugees - tbc
	20.30	Departure to the Airport by bus	
	21.30	Arrival at the Airport	
	22.00	A37259 Mytilene to Athens	
	22.50	Arrival at Athens airport	
		Transfer to the hotel by bus	
	23.30	HOTEL NJV PALACE IN ATHENS Leof. Vasileos Georgiou 2, Athina 105 64, Greece, T- +30 21 0335 2400, Website: http://www.njvathensplazahotel.com INTERCONTINENTAL ATHENAEUM ATHENS Syngrou Avenue 89-93, Athina 117 45, Greece , Tel.: +30 210 9206000 , Fax: +30 210 9206500	

Date	Time	Activity 1	Interlocutors
	08.00	Check out from the hotel	
Friday 20 May 2016 AM	08.15	Departure from Hotel NJV Palace by foot to the European Parliament Office in Athens, 8, Amalias Avenue	
	08.30	Meeting	Representatives of Greek Government authorities - details to be confirmed, At European Parliament Office, Athens, 8, Amalias Avenue
	10.00	Press conference, European Parliament Office, Athens	
	11.00	Departure by foot from the EP Office to the Hellenic Parliament, Syntagma Square, Athens	
	11.15	Joint session	Members of the Hellenic Parliament Committee on European Affairs and Committee on Administration, Public Order and Justice, participants tbc At Hellenic Parliament, Parliament Mansion (Megaro Voulis), GR-10021, Athens, Syntagma Square http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/
	12.30	Departure by foot from the Hellenic Parliament to Njv Plaza hotel, Leof. Vasileos Georgiou 2, Athina 105 64, Greece, T- +30 21 0335 2400	
	13.00	Working lunch	Head of Greek Asylum Service Head of FRONTEX liaison office Room Atlantic, Hotel NJV Palace, 2, Vasileos Georgiou A' str., Syntagma square, Athens

Date	Time	Activity 1	Interlocutors
Friday, 20 May 2016, PM	14.30	Departure to the Airport by bus	
	15.30	Arrival at Athens Airport	
	17.25	A3 622 Athens to Brussels	
	19.45	Arrival at Brussels Airport	

Annex III - Final list of participants

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Mission to Greece

17 - 20 May 2016

Final list of participants

MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (protocol order)

Nr	Name	Group ⁷	Full Member/ Substitute	Country
1	NIEDERMÜLLER Peter (Head of Delegation)	S&D	M	HU
2	SIPPEL Birgit	S&D	M	DE
3	STEVENS Helga	ECR	M	BE
4	BJÖRK Malin	GUE/NGL	M	SE
5	GABRIEL Mariya	EPP	M	BG
6	FERRARA Laura	EFDD	M	IT
7	THUN UND HOHENSTEIN Róza Maria Gräfin	EPP	S	PL
8	ATKINSON Janice	ENF	S	UK
9	CORAZZA BILDT Anna Maria	EPP	S	SE
	VOZEMBERG-VRIONIDI Elissavet (out of quota)	EPP	S	EL

⁷ EPP Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
S&D Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
ECR Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
GUE European United Left - Nordic Green Left
EFDD Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group
ENF Europe of Nations and Freedom

STAFF OF THE POLITICAL GROUPS

Name	Group
Eva MITSOPOULOU	EPP
Shane MURPHY	S&D
Paul David MOYNAN	ECR
Amandine BACH	GUE/NGL
Emanuele SANGUINETI	EFDD
Ágnes JOUTEUX-KADA	ENF

STAFF OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE LIBE COMMITTEE

Danai PAPADOPOULOU	Administrator
Erika SCHULZE	Administrator

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT INFORMATION OFFICE IN GREECE

Leonidas ANTONAKOPOULOS	Head of Unit
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INTERPRETATION

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Mourad RAMDANI (Mr)	AR
Antonios ANTONAKIS (Mr)	EL
Georgios PETROU (Mr)	EL
José Ramon FISHER RODRIGUEZ (Mr)	EN
Juliana HOGAN (Mme)	EN
Antonella PETRACCHI (Mme)	IT
Marco SAVELLA (Mr)(HEAD OF DELEGATION OF INTE)	IT
Brett BEST (Mrs)	Sign interpreter to Mep Helga Stevens
Andrew CARMICHAEL(Mr)	Sign interpreter to Mep Helga Stevens
Timo AHONEN	TECHNICIAN - DG INTE

STAFF OF DG COMMUNICATION

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Nikolas SAGOS	Sound engineer
Kostadinos ZOUDOURIDIS	



European
Commission

Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

Greece-Refugee Crisis

ECHO CRISIS REPORT N°1

Period covered
01/02/2016 to
03/05/2016

ECHO Field Office
Athens-Greece

Facts and Figures
(UNHCR as of 3 May)

Sea arrivals in Greece
(January to April)
2016: 154,661

Dead/missing persons
at sea in 2016: 1361
(whole
Mediterranean)

Refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants on Greece mainland: 45 852 spread around approximately 35 formal and informal sites.

8 190 remain on the islands following the EU-Turkey deal of 20 March 2016

ECHO Emergency Contact

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1. Map

Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) | Analytical Team | 03/05/2016
EMERGENCY SUPPORT INSTRUMENT - GREECE



2. Humanitarian Situation

Between January 2015 and March 2016, over 1.1 million people – refugees and migrants – made their way to countries of the European Union, escaping conflict in their countries of origin or in search of a better and safer life. The majority of these people used the Western Balkan migratory route, reaching the Greek islands by boat from Turkey, then continued to the mainland and the northern border of Greece and crossing into the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and then onwards until eventually reaching central and northern Europe.

On 9 March 2016 the situation changed drastically following the complete closure of the border by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. With the complete closure of the border the humanitarian situation turned from one of responding to a 'population on the move' to one having to provide for people stranded in Greece, initially mainly at makeshift camps in the North of Greece

at the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Idomeni) but also in the port of Piraeus. The needs changed from short-term support to the provision of longer term humanitarian support. A large number of people were now stranded in Greece, with the majority of infrastructure and several humanitarian actors concentrated on the islands rather than the mainland. During the whole month of March and April there was a rapid and substantial shift from the islands to the mainland, without excluding support to continuously being provided on the islands, too.

On 20 March the European Union and Turkey agreed to target the people smugglers' business model and remove the incentive to seek irregular routes into the EU, in compliance with EU and international law. According to this new agreement, all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey. Moreover, for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to an EU Member State. Those who had arrived on the Greek islands before 20 March were moved to the mainland since they were not subject to the same re-admission policy as those who arrived after that date.

Currently there are in total 54 042 refugees (UNCHR), asylum seekers and migrants stranded in Greece in approximately 35 formal and informal sites. Of these, there are 45 852 refugees and migrants on mainland Greece (UNCHR). 8 190 (UNCHR) remain on the islands following the EU Turkey deal. Out of the total number, 49% of the people arriving are from Syria, 26 % from Afghanistan, 16 % from Iraq, 4 % from Pakistan and 4 % from Iran (UNHCR).

The situation in the unofficial sites in the north (Idomeni) and the port of Piraeus remains dire as there is no appropriate infrastructure to host people. The refugees are sleeping in tents or out in the open, exposed to cold, rain and flooding. The Greek authorities are trying to convince people to move both from Idomeni and from Piraeus to other official sites with better conditions. In Idomeni the number of people present has decreased from some 14 000 to some 10 000 people and in Piraeus from over 6 000 people to fewer than half of this number (UNHCR).

Sanitation is a key area for improvement in several sites in the North, including Idomeni. However, it should be noted that the organisation of formal sites is improving and development is continuing under the supervision of the Greek authorities. One area where further development is needed as a priority is provision of information to refugees and migrants on their options and status, as this continues to be underprovided and inconsistent, requiring reinforcement.

Following the EU-Turkey deal the number of arrivals on the islands has dropped significantly to an average of 120 per day as of 26 April. Migrants/refugees arriving on the islands after the 20 March have to stay within the closed facilities (hotspots), which are currently hosting a far larger number of people than their capacity. Assessment and monitoring visits conducted by humanitarian experts of DG ECHO have shown that capacity is the main challenge on the island of Lesbos, which receives the majority of arrivals to Greece.

In response to the refugee crisis in Greece, a number of EU instruments such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund⁸ and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) have already provided significant financial resources for assistance inside Europe. In addition, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism⁹ has been used for mobilising in-kind support such as shelter, hygiene material and medical supplies to support countries of the region in coping with the increased number of arrivals.

On 19 February 2016, the European Council called for urgent and concrete proposals from the Commission to "put in place the capacity for the EU to provide humanitarian assistance internally". This materialised in the form of the new EU Emergency Support Instrument to provide emergency financial support for humanitarian relief operations, to support Member States and complement their

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/20160412/factsheet_managing_refugee_crisis_eu_financial_support_greece_en.pdf

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/Refugee_Crisis/EUCPM_Support_en.pdf

actions. The Instrument has been activated to address the exceptional humanitarian challenges stemming from the refugee crisis. With an initial budget of €700 million from 2016-2018, to address the growing humanitarian needs in the European Union, particularly in EU countries along the Western Balkans route. €300 million are estimated to be required to complement action already taken in 2016, with a further €200 million each in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

3. Humanitarian Response

The objective of the response under the new Emergency Support Instrument is to, through the provision of multi-sectorial support, meet the basic needs of persons adversely affected by the humanitarian crisis situation resulting from the current influx of refugees and migrants into the European Union, in Greece and any other Union Member State that could happen to be affected.

At the moment there is no doubt that most needs are in Greece. Grant agreements have been signed with eight DG ECHO partners for a total of €83 million for projects to be implemented in Greece. All of the partners that have been selected were already present in Greece and will be working with local NGOs, complementing the support provided by the Greek civil society. All activities are carried out in close cooperation and consultation with the Greek authorities.

Numerous camps have been built by the Greek authorities in order to provide shelter and water and sanitation facilities to refugees and migrants. Food and non-food items have also been provided by the Greek authorities as well as from the generous Greek public. The eight partners will complement Government's ongoing efforts and are responding to gaps and needs as necessary.

For example, one of the most urgent needs is related to health. People are exhausted after a long and often dramatic journey, coming from countries affected by conflicts. IFRC, MDM and ASB are providing basic health care and organized the referral system for the most serious cases. These partners, as well as IRC and Save the Children also provide psycho-social support, and child and women friendly spaces. Non-formal education for children, based on their age and background will also be provided. Special attention is given to unaccompanied children, to ensure their protection and to seek the reestablishment of family links (UNHCR, IFRC, Save the Children, IRC, ASB).

In order for people to be able to address their needs in a dignified manner, considerations will be given to a voucher programme will be put in place by OXFAM and IRC. More partners may also implement voucher programmes following a feasibility assessment. Other partners will be providing material assistance ranging from blankets to hygiene products and clothing.

Another important need is in relation to shelter in general and sanitation facilities in particular. Though both have been provided in the formal sites, in most places it requires improvement or upgrading, for instance ensuring access for people with disabilities or to separate facilities for men and women (UNHCR, IFRC, DRC, OXFAM, ASB).