

**Question for oral answer O-00027/2014  
to the Commission**

Rule 115

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on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

Subject: 'Push-backs' off the coast of Greece (Farmakonisi) resulting in refugee deaths

Just as Greece took over the EU presidency, a boat carrying 26 Afghans and 2 Syrians capsized off the coast of Greece (near the island of Farmakonisi) while being towed by the Greek Coastguard, apparently towards Turkey, which resulted in 2 deaths and 10 missing persons. Survivors reported that the Greek Coastguard boat was speeding and that Greek coastguards actually tried to prevent the refugees from climbing into their boat by kicking them back into the sea.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights have repeatedly called on Greece to end collective expulsions, and international NGOs (ProAsyl and Amnesty) have evidence of Greek border and coast guards regularly performing 'push-backs'. According to the reports, people seeking protection in Europe are systematically and brutally prevented from entering Greek territory. Refugees are beaten by the Greek authorities, re-exposed to the elements in unseaworthy boats on the high seas and have money, mobile telephones and identity documents taken from them. The Greek authorities do not check whether the people are in need of protection. Almost all of these human rights violations have been committed within the operating area of Frontex (the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the EU).

In view of the above:

1. How will the Commission ensure that investigations take place into this evidence of systematic 'push-backs' and human rights violations by the Greek authorities? Has Greece taken appropriate disciplinary action against border and coast guards who have violated refugees' fundamental rights or international protection obligations and, if so, in which and in how many cases?
2. Will the Commission investigate the role of the EU and its agencies as abettors to 'push-backs' and human rights violations at the EU's external borders?
3. Does the Commission believe that Frontex should suspend operations at the border between Greece and Turkey and in the Aegean Sea because of serious human rights violations as referred to in Article 3(1) of the Frontex Regulation?

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Forwarded: 31.1.2014

Deadline for reply: 7.2.2014