



**MARGARITIS SCHINAS**

Vice-President of the European Commission  
Promoting our European Way of Life

**YLVA JOHANSSON**

Member of the European Commission  
Home Affairs

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Dear Honourable Chair Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar,

I would like to thank you for your letter dated 12 March 2020 regarding the situation in Greece and along the Greek-Turkish border.

Greece is facing an unprecedented situation. This is further complicated by the current challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our first priority now is to support the Greek authorities in putting in place an emergency contingency and support plan in case there will be an outbreak of the virus in the already overcrowded islands.

As you know, since the recent increase of pressure at the EU's external border, the Commission has engaged with all relevant instruments to ensure full solidarity with Greece. The increase in the number of people in the hotspots has led to a deterioration of migrants' living conditions and has put a significant strain on Greece. It is our duty to support Member States under extreme pressure and to put people first.

For this purpose, following the visit of President von der Leyen together with President Sassoli and President Michel, the Commission adopted a comprehensive Action Plan with concrete support measures for Greece on 4 March 2020. The Plan is already delivering results.

Mr Juan Fernando López Aguilar  
Member of the European Committee  
Chair of Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs  
Parlement européen  
Bât. ALTIERO SPINELLI  
14G305  
60, rue Wiertz / Wiertzstraat 60  
B-1047 Bruxelles/Brussel

Two rapid border intervention operations by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) at the land and sea borders between Greece and Turkey were launched and 100 border guard officers have now been deployed.

Following the activation by Greece of the Civil Protection Mechanism, Member States have offered more than 90,000 items of assistance to Greece including medical equipment, shelters, tents, blankets, and other necessary supplies.

Financial assistance of up to €700 million will be made available. €350 million are immediately available and we are proposing an amending budget to mobilise a further €350 million. We count on your support in this regard.

The immediately available €350 million financial assistance consists of:

- Rental accommodation (25,000 beds) and cash assistance to migrants provided by UNHCR: €200 million
- 31 camps – management and services provided by IOM: €100 million
- Specific reception centre on Lesbos for families run by UNHCR: €25 million
- Extra reception capacities in hotel until further reception places are available: €25 million

With the support of Frontex as well as of the IOM, a new assisted voluntary return scheme will be launched that will support the Greek authorities to promote the voluntary return of up to 5,000 migrants who arrived before 1 January 2020 and are currently present on the islands.

EASO should also deploy additional experts in support to the Greek asylum service and according to the needs identified by the Greek authorities. The Commission is also closely monitoring Member States' legislation on international protection to ensure that this is in line with the EU acquis.

However, all these measures need now to be seen in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the efforts deployed in that respect to ensure in the first place that there will be no outbreak of the virus in particular in the islands and that the appropriate support is provided should this nevertheless be the case.

In parallel to these urgent measures, the Commission is working with the Greek authorities to find more sustainable solutions, including through relocations. The protection of some of Europe's most vulnerable people, including unaccompanied migrant children is a priority.

That is why I have launched, together with the Greek Authorities, an urgent call for action to Member States to relocate unaccompanied children from the Greek islands. We have already received positive reactions from 8 Member States with up to 1,600 pledges and will continue contacts and coordination. We stand ready to provide increased financial and operational support for Greece and Member States in this respect.

A conference on children in migration will also be held with Member States in spring. The focus will be on relocation efforts and the Commission will support its organisation.

As you know, over the past months we have been working on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. However, we will now need to take into account the exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue working towards finding sustainable solutions which take into account the different and varied challenges faced by Member States.

During these challenging times, the Commission will continue working in parallel on immediate and long-term actions. On the one hand, to support Greece in handling the extraordinary challenges it is confronted with, in full compliance with EU law, fundamental rights and human dignity and, on the other hand, working intensively to advance on proposals for a New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

We need to continue to build trust and find pragmatic and common solutions that uphold our international commitments and European values.

I trust I can count on your support.

Yours sincerely,



Margaritis SCHINAS



Ylva JOHANSSON

