



Recommendations for EU policy to address ‘push-backs’ of migrants’ rights in Greece

BRUSSELS, 20 March 2014 – A joint group of civil society organisations and EU leaders today called for action on EU level to address the daily human rights violations experienced by migrants in Greece, at the borders, in detention and on the streets, including push-backs, unlawful detention, violence and exploitation. The organisations urge European Union policy makers and representatives to take joint responsibility, along with the Greek government, for addressing the challenges there.

Nikos Chrysogelos MEP (Greens/EFA), host of the public hearing “EU Migration Policy: A Push Back for Migrants’ Rights in Greece?” held at the European Parliament on the day, emphasised:

“Human life has a value and people without papers have the equal right to life. We need to find a solution and stop the dying of immigrants in the Mediterranean Sea. Both Frontex and national authorities should let immigrants in, also those who are undocumented. Unfortunately, there is no legal framework for people who flee from war-stricken countries to be received in other countries as war refugees. Countries which pursue charges against those who help migrants have to change their legislation.”

In the context of increased surveillance of the EU’s external borders in Greece, there have been frequent reports of human rights violations, including push-backs, collective expulsions and dangerous manoeuvres that have put migrants’ lives in danger. Migrants who are apprehended at borders or during immigration checks throughout Greece, including children, face systematic detention of up to 18 months, in appalling conditions, in violation of numerous human rights and European Union law.

Spyros Rizakos of the Greek organisation Aitima highlighted that although such practices are in violation of European Union law and must be addressed as such, they are in line with the general approach to cooperation on migration at EU level, which continues to focus on increased border control and surveillance, detention and facilitating deportations through cooperation with third countries:

“Greece as well as the other Southern European countries only implement European border control policy. This policy, which often results in loss of life, is in flagrant violation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. There is no point in having legislation to protect human rights when it is not respected in reality - Europe has to make a choice: abolish this legislation or stop violating it.”

Greece’s deep economic crisis, resulting austerity measures and inattention to their social impacts have led to one of the highest poverty rates in the EU, with negative impacts on the human rights of Greek citizens and migrants alike. Migrants, particularly those who are undocumented, have become further excluded from accessing public services, and pushed into destitution and exclusion. This situation is also contributing to a rise of xenophobia and negative attitudes where migrants are blamed for the economic and social crisis, in some cases leading to physical and verbal attacks against migrants.

To address these issues, EU networks and Greek NGOs have released today their joint [**“Recommendations to the European Union to Urgently Address Criminalisation and Violence Against Migrants in Greece”**](#). The recommendations urge the EU to improve implementation of EU law, including human rights, in Greece. In particular, the EU should shift the focus of its financial and technical support to Greece from border surveillance and investments in detention, to measures that ensure that migrants’ human rights are protected, regardless of residence status. This should include supporting the development of Greece’s administrative capacity to process immigration and asylum-related applications in full respect of procedural guarantees, and its open reception infrastructures. It also means pursuing an end to the systematic detention of migrants in Greece, including through supporting the implementation of alternatives to detention, for vulnerable groups as a priority.

Investment in universal, quality and affordable social services and adequate social protection should be integrated as a priority into the budgetary negotiations with the Troika, as well as in the allocation of the European Social and Investment Funds (ESIF). Migration should also be recognised as a social policy issue, as it concerns the well-being and participation of migrants who are, first and foremost, men, women and children living in Europe.

The EU 'Victims' Directive' - Directive 2012/29/EU which establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime - will also be a key tool in the coming months, to ensure access to justice and support for all victims of crime, irrespective of their residence status. In the pending criminal investigation into the tragedy off Farmakonisi island, which occurred on 20 January 2014 and resulted in the deaths of 12 migrants, including 9 children, the European Commission should ensure the effective transposition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Victims' Directive.

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For more information on the project "Promoting EU Action to Address Criminalisation of and Violence Against Migrants in Greece", click [here](#).

[DIRECTIVE 2012/29/EU](#) establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

["Racism, discrimination, intolerance and extremism: learning from experiences in Greece and Hungary"](#), EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2013

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