



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL MIGRATION and HOME AFFAIRS

Directorate C: Migration and Protection
Unit C.4 : Migration management support
Head of Unit

Brussels,
DG HOME/C4 CFE/ Ares(2017)

Subject: Petition addressed to President Jean-Claude Juncker on the situation of refugees on the Greek islands

Ref.: Electronic message received on 11 January 2017

Dear Petitioners,

Thank you for your above-mentioned message and the concerns expressed through the Amnesty International website on the situation of migrants and refugees in the Eastern Aegean Islands during this winter. President Juncker has asked me to reply to you.

The Commission shares your concerns regarding the difficult living conditions of irregular migrants and asylum seekers on the Greek islands due to extremely cold weather and snow. Let me reassure you that we have been and remain in close contact with the Greek authorities and UNHCR in order to improve the situation and ensure that the persons of concern on the islands receive appropriate shelter. The Greek authorities have deployed, as an emergency measure, a naval asset in order to temporarily accommodate a large number of those persons in need at the island of Lesbos.

In this context, on 18 January 2017, Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos together with the Greek Minister for Migration Policy, Ioannis Mouzalas visited the camps in Lesbos in order to closely check the situation on the ground and show support not only to the migrants and refugees but also the local population.

The Greek authorities have assured the Commission that a number of applicants for international protection have already been transferred from the Greek islands to the mainland, namely those that are particularly vulnerable as well as those for whom the Dublin procedure may apply on the basis of the family reunification criteria therein.

The Greek authorities in cooperation with the Commission, relevant EU agencies, in particular EASO, and other stakeholders, are taking different urgent measures in order to relieve the pressure in the overcrowded hotspots on the Aegean islands. Such measures are implemented in accordance with the Joint Action Plan on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement elaborated by the EU coordinator for the implementation of the

EU-Turkey Statement with the Greek authorities in December 2016, validated by the European Council meeting on the 15th of December 2016¹.

I take this opportunity to assure you that the Commission takes all the possible measures and initiatives in order to support Greek authorities, international organisations and civil society in tackling the migratory crisis and improve the situation of migrants and refugees in Greece.

Yours sincerely,

M. Schieffer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Schieffer', written in a cursive style.

Head of Unit

¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/12/15-euco-conclusions-final/>