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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

Progress Report on the Implementation of the hotspots in Greece

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The dramatic number of arrivals of migrants on the Greek islands in 2015 (713,799 as of 3 December according to Frontex) created a migratory and humanitarian crisis requiring urgent action.

On 29 September 2015, the Commission adopted a Communication outlining the immediate operational, budgetary and legal measures under the European Agenda on Migration, and calling for the full roll-out of the Relocation Scheme and Migration Management Support Teams working in 'hotspot' areas.

However, the Communication of 29 September found that the implementation of European Union Law with regard to building a Common European Asylum System has been proceeding too slowly in the Member States. As a result, on 14 October, the Commission presented a Communication on the state of play of the implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration, setting out the next steps for the coming six months.

In particular, the Commission called on Greece to implement the action plan for the roll-out of the remaining hotspots by the end of November 2015, improve the registration capacity within the EURODAC fingerprinting system, enhance the temporary accommodation capacity in the hotspots, and create a crisis management command structure to ensure the daily monitoring of the hotspots and the relocation exercise.

Although since the last report in October, the number of new arrivals has been decreasing (136,827 of migrants in November, against 211,000 in October according to the UNHCR), current numbers remain very high.

For the proper management of these exceptionally high migration flows, it is crucial to implement priority actions in five key areas: Establishing functioning hotspots, implementing the relocation program, ensuring effective returns of migrants not entitled to international protection, improving border management and creating sufficient and adequate reception capacity.

Some progress has been made since the European Council of 15 October, albeit with delays compared to original planning. There is currently only one not yet fully functioning hotspot in Moria (Lesvos). The opening of further hotspots expected for the end of November has not taken place. However, works have started to expand and upgrade the Moria site and to construct the hotspot site in Leros. According to the construction workflow planning, both sites should be fully completed on 8 January 2016. In Chios, the site for the construction has been identified and construction supplies were delivered on 11 December. Provided the works start as planned in the week of 14-18 December, they can be completed in the first half of January 2016. Works in Kos have not advanced and have not yet started in Samos where the construction site remains to be identified. This work needs to be accelerated.

Since the October European Council, four relocation flights have taken place and two more are planned for 17 December and the beginning of January. Stronger efforts should be made to improve information provision to both service providers on the ground and migrants, as well as to increase the capacity to identify and register relocation candidates. In order to reduce uncertainty and increase the efficiency of the implementation of the relocation scheme, eligible asylum-seekers need to be properly informed about their obligations when taking part

in the scheme. At the same time, Member States must be reminded that this is a binding scheme, and the number of places they make available must be increased. At present, the main bottlenecks to relocation are the time it takes to get approvals from receiving Member States and the low number of relocation pledges by other Member States: By 15 December, 297 relocation candidates had been submitted for approval by the Greek authorities to other Member States.

Returns of migrants (both voluntary and forced) need to be significantly enhanced. In the area of border management a step has been made with the agreement for Frontex deployment in the northern border on 3 December 2015, the details of which still need to be defined. Moreover a significant step has been made with the activation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT) on 12 December, which is expected to upgrade the capacity of border management at sea. Finally, as regards reception capacity, there are important developments to report. The completion of all 5 hotspots by end of January 2016 will ensure the provision of 7,000 first reception places on the 5 islands. The Commission and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched on 14 December a rental scheme creating 20,000 additional reception places for Asylum and relocation on the mainland. As part of the (re)development of the hotspot sites in Lesbos, Leros and Chios 4,500 reception places will be created by early January 2016. 35,000 reception places should be available in Greece by early January 2016 (Greece had committed at the Western Balkans Leaders' meeting to make 30,000 places available by the end of 2015 and a total of at least 50,000).

In sum, despite progress made with the support of the Commission on the ground, there is still a lot of work to be done. All five hotspots need to be completed without further delays. The registration process needs to be further improved including by significantly increasing the number of EURODAC fingerprinting machines. The relocation and return programs need to be stepped up further and the deployment of experts through Frontex and assets needs to be accelerated.

The Commission has dedicated specific efforts to assist Greece in the establishment of the hotspots, in particular through the direct day-by-day involvement of the Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) – a new Commission service launched on 1 July 2015 under the direct authority of President Jean-Claude Juncker and providing specialised technical assistance to Member States to implement important administrative and structural reforms. The SRSS is assisted in Greece through a specific team from DG HOME with dedicated persons in Greece providing assistance on the ground with frequent visits to the five hotspot islands (one deployed to the island of Lesbos).

Commission supports Greece on the ground

A Commission team led by the Director-General of the Structural Reform Support Service (DG SRSS) is providing hands-on support to Greece to deal with the refugee crisis. Over the past eight weeks, the DG SRSS has spent half of his time in Greece on the ground steering the team and coordinating efforts with the Greek authorities.

The team of 47 (of which 12 are based in Athens) is helping Greece to get accelerated access to emergency funding, to improve the coordination between the various actors involved, to address administrative bottlenecks and to facilitate knowledge sharing on border management and relocation. The SRSS played a key role in launching, together with the UNHCR, the rental scheme to provide 20,000 reception places for asylum seekers in Greece – in line with

the commitment made during the Western Balkans Leaders' Meeting on 25 October 2015. The team of the SRSS facilitated and accelerated the launch of the UNHCR's Call for Expression of Interest to potential partners for the provision of 20,000 reception notably by securing – in coordination with other Commission services – €80 million from the 2016 EU budget necessary to provide the reception places through rent subsidies and host family programmes.

Other concrete examples of support include:

- thanks to SRSS support, progress has been made in the implementation of the legally binding EU readmission agreement with Pakistan. The agreement was not functioning effectively, with travel documents for returnees not being recognised or the necessary paperwork repeatedly delayed. The SRSS team brought the Greek and Pakistani authorities together to work out the administrative difficulties and secure a commitment on both sides to speed up the implementation of the readmission agreement and accelerate the return of Pakistani nationals not eligible for international protection. As a result, a first return flight from Greece to Pakistan could be organised on 2 December with 19 refugees being successfully returned.
- various interventions – including several dedicated funding missions from Brussels – to unlock financial support for relocation, returns and reception; it was thanks to the work of the SRSS that emergency assistance of some €2.5 million was made available to the Hellenic police and to the IOM in December to unlock the successful resumption of the programme of forced returns and Assisted Voluntary Returns.
- support for overcoming the administrative hurdles related to relocation: together with the Greek Asylum office, the SRSS worked out an information leaflet and a form – also available in Arabic for the identification of potential beneficiaries for relocation.
- providing advice on procurement issues: it was thanks to the work of the SRSS that an expedited public procurement procedure for six additional EURODAC fingerprinting machines could be launched in December.
- establishment of an interagency coordination mechanism with clear reporting lines: one of the main challenges with regards to the functioning of the hotspots, was the issue of coordination. While political coordination structures were easily set up, it took several meetings between the SRSS and the General Secretary for Government Coordination in Greece in order to get appointed an operations manager in every hotspot and a contact-point coordinator at central level. This facilitates the information exchange between the hotspots and the central level. In addition, the Hellenic police has been designated as the central authority in charge for the construction work of the hotspots.
- establishment of interagency working groups to optimise the functioning of hotspots and the relocation process, as well as providing expert advice on these matters by for example providing help in the request for activating the RABIT support teams.
- support in dealing with third countries on readmission.

The Commission is providing substantial emergency financial support – on top of the €474 million in funding foreseen for migration and border management from 2014-20 – to facilitate reception, returns, and relocation in Greece.

Emergency Assistance as of 10.12.2015

Member State		AMIF	ISF Borders and Visa	TOTAL
Greece	EUR	9,709,724.50	18,157,428.84	27,867,153.34
Greece / UNHCR	EUR		4,129,700.16	
Greece / IOM	EUR	20,000,000.00		

I. HOTSPOT AREAS – STATE OF PLAY

1. Five hotspot areas have been identified by the Greek authorities in Lesvos, Leros, Kos, Chios and Samos.
2. Moria (Lesvos) is currently the only operating hotspot with a registration workflow including: screening, documents check, fingerprinting and registration with the support of Frontex, as well as the opportunity to apply for asylum and relocation with the help of European Asylum Support Office (EASO). The fingerprints are registered directly into EURODAC; currently 22 EURODAC devices are in operation; 36 are estimated necessary and the remaining will be in place at the latest by mid-January 2016.
3. Greece has clarified by ministerial decision of 2 December that the First Reception Service will be in charge of the management of the daily operation of the hotspots. The Alternate Minister for Migration is in charge of the planning, coordination, technical design, supervision and the delivery of the works, in collaboration – where applicable – with other services.
4. The Greek authorities have developed engineering plans for the further development and refurbishment of the hotspot areas of Lesbos, Leros, Chios and Kos with the support of UNHCR site planners and the Greek military. Works have started early December in Lesbos and Leros and according to the construction work flow plan are expected to be concluded on 8 January 2016. Construction supplies were delivered to Chios on 11 December 2015. Provided that construction starts as planned in the week of 14-18 December, the works should be completed by mid-January.
5. Works in Kos have been delayed because of local protest and it is not clear when the works will resume. In Samos the location of the hotspot is still to be determined and engineering plans will be developed accordingly in view of completing the work by end of January.
6. Greece has created a central coordination committee involving the most implicated services and chaired by the Secretary General for Coordination. Greece has also appointed temporary hotspot coordinators for every Island from the Hellenic Police. The Greek authorities have indicated that they will be replaced by officials from the First Reception Service once the works in the hotspots have been completed.

7. A working group comprising the Greek authorities, the European Commission, the EU agencies and UNHCR has been established to optimise the organisation of the hotspots and plan the necessary deployments in terms of assets and experts.
8. Following the appointment of 31 team leaders from the Hellenic Police on 7 December 2015, Frontex will gradually increase its presence in January 2016. In December 2015, FRONTEX will deploy 165 additional staff. Currently 304 Frontex Guest Officers are deployed in the five islands identified as hotspots, assisting in the screening and fingerprinting, as well as checking the authenticity of documents.
9. Registration continues to be partially done following the EURODAC procedure, and partially done on paper/ink in all identified hotspot areas due to a lack of EURODAC finger printing devices. In total, 46 EURODAC fingerprinting devices are deployed in the hotspot areas while an additional 30 are necessary for the correct functioning of the system. In order to address this gap 15 EURODAC machines have been provided by Germany, 9 have been procured by UNHCR and 6 are in the process of being procured through an ISF emergency grant. Consequently, by mid-January, the needs for EURODAC machines at the hotspots should be fully met so that fingerprinting will no longer need to be done using ink and therefore entering the fingerprints with a delay into the EURODAC database. Regarding additional needs in the mainland as well as replacement needs, the Greek authorities submitted, on 10 December, a request for emergency funding to cover the purchase of an additional 90 EURODAC machines. In addition, a further call for fingerprinting equipment was launched through the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) platform on 9 December.
10. Frontex, EASO and EU-Lisa have completed a pilot project to enhance the processing capacity of the hotspot by streamlining workflows. The findings have been presented to the authorities and other partners. EUROPOL has deployed a dedicated officer in the context of the EU Regional Task Force in Piraeus alongside those already appointed by Frontex and EASO.
11. While recognising the steps taken by the Greek authorities to address the problem of fingerprinting of migrants arriving irregularly. The Commission has issued a Letter of Formal Notice on 10 December requesting further information from the Greek authorities concerning the existing situation. The Commission has noticed discrepancies between the number of illegal border-crossings detected at the Greek external borders and the number of people fingerprinted. For the period from 20 July 2015 to 30 November 2015 Frontex data reports 492,744 irregular arrivals of third country nationals in Greece. Eurodac statistics for Greece indicate that only 121,325 third-country nationals were fingerprinted.

What still needs to be done

1. Greece needs to complete the construction of the hotspots at Lesbos, Leros and Chios, in line with the planned timetable. Construction works at Kos should commence immediately and a location in Samos should be identified in order to roll-out the hotspot by end of January.
2. Greece should, in collaboration with the European Commission, EU agencies, and UNHCR, optimise the organisation of the hotspots based on an island by island evaluation of the needs and drawing on the findings of the inter-Agency pilot project. In this context,

a structured system for disembarkation at official disembarkation points as well as transportation to the hotspot areas should be established.

3. On the basis of a refined needs assessment, Member States should make available the necessary experts in order to ensure the full roll-out of the hotspots as soon as construction works are concluded. Greece should in turn ensure that a sufficient number of team leaders are deployed and should ensure that sufficient security personnel are present in the hotspot areas.
4. Greece should procure – without further delay and making use of accelerated/simplified procedures provided for in Directives 2004/18/EC and 2014/24/EU in case of "urgency" or "extreme urgency" – the necessary additional fingerprinting machines.
5. IT systems should be updated to first deploy a fully-fledged Automated Fingerprinting Identification System (AFIS) and then to ensure that interconnections between national and EU/international databases are established, thereby allowing for a full check of arriving migrants against Schengen Information System (SIS) II/Interpol Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (STLD) databases.
6. Greece, with the support of the European Commission and EU Agencies, should define the needs in terms of cultural mediators/interpreters and strengthen their presence in the hotspot areas.
7. Coordination needs to be further improved by making systematic and effective use of the coordination mechanisms that have been put in place. Appointed coordinators for the islands should be empowered by way of dedicated Terms of Reference to coordinate all relevant governmental and non-governmental players involved in the hotspot locations.
8. EUROPOL should strengthen its presence in Greece and should conclude operational agreements with the Greek authorities in order to support them in fighting smuggling. Support should include the launch of financial investigations, actions against document fraud, and better use of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILO) networks in third countries as sources of relevant information.
9. The Hellenic Police should provide training to police officers placed in the hotspots for forged document identification.

II. RELOCATION – STATE OF PLAY

1. A first relocation flight from Greece to Luxembourg with 30 asylum seekers took place on 4 November 2015. In December, the pace of relocation accelerated with relocation flights taking place on 10 December 2015 (Finland), 14 December (Germany) and 15 December (Lithuania). The next flight is planned for 17 December (Portugal) and another one in early January (Latvia). By 17 December 2015, a total number of 76 asylum seekers will have been relocated from Greece.
2. In total, 370 relocation candidates have been currently registered as applicants for international protection and, as of 11 December, 297 had been submitted for approval by the Greek authorities to other Member States.
3. At present there are more relocation candidates than places for relocation. Only 9 Member States have made available 305 places for relocation candidates while 14 Member States have appointed Liaison Officers. A first meeting of the Liaison Officers in Greece was held on the 27 November 2015 and a second meeting was held on the 9 of December.
4. The information provision to refugees about the relocation programme is currently limited to the hotspot of Lesbos where EASO, the UNHCR and the Greek Asylum Service are present. In total, EASO has deployed 6 experts to this end and plans to expand presence to 10 in the days to come.
5. EASO has procured 10 additional mobile units plus equipment to support the relocation process on the Islands. The mobile units have arrived in Greece and can be deployed any time on all of the five hotspot islands.
6. The staff of the Greek Asylum Service devoted to relocation is currently still limited. However, their capacity is still significantly higher (capacity to register 40-50 per day) than the number of applicants expressing an interest for registration (around 10 per day). EASO will support the Greek Asylum Service in the registration phase by deploying experts on nationality assessment and exclusion clauses.
7. The Commission is about to make available to Greece through the respective Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) National Programme the agreed funding support (€500 per relocated person) to support the transfers under the relocation program. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) will be entrusted by the Greek Asylum Service with the operational aspects of the relocation program and has agreed to pre-finance current transfers, pending the conclusion of a complementary emergency grant agreement with the Commission amounting to €20 million, to be signed before the end of December 2015.
8. A working group comprising the Greek authorities, the European Commission, the EU agencies, IOM and UNHCR has been established with a view to optimising the relocation process.
9. The European Commission is supporting the relocation process by making available the necessary financing and providing technical support to Greece through its team on the ground.

What still needs to be done

1. Information provision to refugees about the relocation programme needs to be stepped up, inter alia by increasing the presence of the staff of the Greek Asylum Service and of EASO in the hotspots as well as by producing and distributing information material to potential relocation candidates about the relocation process and their rights and duties in that context. The Member States Liaison Officers should provide relocation candidates with information on the assigned destination countries.
2. The capacity to register and process asylum applications needs to be substantially increased. To this end, the Greek Asylum Service intends to hire 40 additional staff by mid-February which should increase its capacity to be able to register 100-120 applications per day. Further staff increases are needed to step up the registration as required.
3. Member States should substantially reduce the response time to relocation requests submitted by the Greek authorities (and refrain from excessive ad hoc checks taking place in Greece).
4. Member States should substantially increase their pledges under the relocation programme.
5. The relocation process should be further optimised on the basis of the recommendations of the working group.

III. RETURN – STATE OF PLAY

1. To return illegally staying third country nationals to their country of origin, Greece still lacks a structured and comprehensive return strategy, in particular regarding forced returns and the detention option where applicable.
2. According to the data provided by Greek authorities, 16,131 forced returns have been performed, the majority of which were to Albania, since the beginning of 2015. Most recently a charter flight hired and coordinated by Frontex departed from Athens on 2 December transferring 49 returnees of Pakistani nationality. The Pakistani authorities accepted only 19 of the returnees in Pakistan. The remaining 30 were not allowed to disembark and have been returned even though they had valid travel documents issued by the Pakistani Embassy in Athens.
3. 5,400 detention places are available to carry out returns, this is considered sufficient in the immediate short-term considering the currently limited capacity to perform forced returns. Severe shortcomings related to conditions in detention – in particular in the provision of food supplies – have been identified. This needs to be improved immediately.
4. According to IOM data, 3,460 Assisted Voluntary Returns have taken place this year. Since July the number of voluntary returns has dropped significantly because of acute funding constraints.
5. The European Commission has made available emergency assistance (some €2.5 million) to the Hellenic police and to the IOM to allow for a quick resumption of the programme of forced returns and Assisted Voluntary Returns. As a result, the Assisted Voluntary Return program has resumed.
6. The European Commission has undertaken dedicated missions, for example to Pakistan, to facilitate readmission.
7. The European Commission will undertake a dedicated monitoring mission in Greece focusing on the return system in order to assess the situation and suggest operational solutions in line with the European acquis.

What still needs to be done

1. The Greek authorities need to develop a clear strategy for forced returns identifying priority third countries for engagement and addressing shortcomings in their detention system. Greece needs to streamline its administrative procedures in order to allow for swift return.
2. Greece needs to step up forced and voluntary returns, as well as take the necessary steps to ensure the immediate absorption of the available AMIF national programme funding.
3. The return activities of the Greek authorities should focus more on the nationalities most relevant in the context of hotspots (Pakistanis, but also Afghans, Iranians and Bangladeshis), instead of the current focus on nationals of Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

4. Information concerning Assisted Voluntary Returns should be promoted to migrants already while they stay in the hotspot areas. An outreach campaign should also be considered in areas close to the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
5. The European Commission, supported by Member States, should further step up engagement with third countries to ensure easier readmission of migrants which are not entitled to international protection. This also includes in particular further efforts to ensure readmission of third-country nationals by Turkey.
6. Frontex should ensure that joint return flights make regular stopovers in Greece in order to perform return operations.
7. Conditions in the detention centres need to be improved urgently.

IV. IMPROVING BORDER MANAGEMENT – STATE OF PLAY

1. On the request of Greece, Frontex will assist Greece with the registration of migrants in the northern border region. A joint technical mission of Frontex and the Hellenic Police has taken place to identify the technical needs. Frontex has already deployed a limited number of staff in the Idomeni region. This number is expected to increase in the course of January.
2. The EU has agreed with Turkey a joint action plan which should lead to a measurable reduction of refugees entering Greece from Turkey.
3. Greece has set up joint working groups with Turkey with a view to deepening the cooperation on border management.
4. Greece has requested the activation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT) for the Aegean on 3 December 2015. The executive director of Frontex took a positive decision to activate RABIT on 10 December. The RABIT operation will lead to an upgrade of the Poseidon Sea Joint Operation, covering the same operational area.
5. To date Member States have pledged 23,698 man-days in response to the Frontex call for 75,489 man-days (31% coverage).

What still needs to be done

1. Greek authorities and Frontex should swiftly define the operational details of the deployment of Frontex officers at the northern Greek border.
2. Further to the RABIT activation, Member States should immediately make available staff and equipment to ensure that the needs identified by Greece and Frontex are fully met.

V. RECEPTION CAPACITY

1. The European Commission and the UNHCR have signed a joint declaration on 14 December for a rental scheme that effectively increases the reception capacity in Greece by 20,000 places on the mainland and a further 7,000 places in the hotspots. On this basis, the UNHCR is expected to select its implementing partners on 18 December. The UNHCR can then immediately provide accommodation for asylum and relocation candidates. To this end, the Commission has agreed to finance €80 million from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund.
2. 4,500 temporary accommodation places are being created as part of the ongoing construction works in Lesbos, Leros and Chios by early January 2016. This number will increase to 7,000 places (first reception) after the completion of the hotspots in Kos and Samos.
3. Greek authorities currently have a second line reception capacity to host up to 2,900 persons in Athens (Eleonas, Elliniko and Palio Faliro). Greece has signed a grant agreement with the Council of Europe Development Bank for the expansion of the Eleonas site near Athens by 500-700 places.
4. In the area of Eidomeni, there is a capacity to host up to 1,500 persons in rub hall and tent accommodation.
5. The pre-removal capacity stands currently at 5,400.
6. On 3 December 2015, Greece requested the activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM). Through this mechanism, Member States are being asked to provide in-kind assistance to improve reception conditions.

What still needs to be done

1. Greece needs to rapidly complete the construction of all 7,000 places for all five hotspot islands.
2. Greece needs to improve the reception of vulnerable groups, in particular unaccompanied minors.
3. More structural solutions need to be found regarding the provision of food and other basic needs in the reception facilities.
4. Greece should continue to increase its reception capacity in line with the Western Balkans Leaders' meeting commitments.
5. Member States should respond immediately to the EUCPM request for assistance.