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European Commission

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Brussels, 19. 05. 2021

Dear Mr Bournous,

Thank you for sharing your concerns on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and on the migration situation in Greece.

During my recent visit to Greece at the end of March, I had the opportunity to speak to the people and the local authorities in Lesvos and discuss with them their efforts to address the immediate impact of the arrival of asylum seekers and migrants over the past years.

As you point out, migration challenges are common and they demand joint efforts and solutions. This is why the New Pact on Migration and Asylum starts with the premise that no Member State should shoulder a disproportionate responsibility and that contributing to solidarity measures is compulsory. To ensure this, the New Pact introduces a system of mandatory solidarity, based on a distribution key and on a wider range of measures including relocation, return sponsorship as well as capacity-building and operational support. It also proposes to reinforce international partnerships with a view to ensuring effective returns, combating migrant smuggling more effectively, and developing legal migration channels.

Over the past years, the Commission has mobilised significant financial, operational and technical assistance in support of Greece. On 3 December 2020, a Memorandum of Understanding was concluded between the Commission, the Greek government and EU Agencies for a joint pilot for new facilities on Lesvos. In this context, the Commission established a dedicated Task Force for Migration Management. Through these joint efforts, progress has been achieved in accelerating procedures and improving the living conditions. The number of migrants and refugees living in Lesvos and the Eastern Aegean islands has been reduced from 42,000 in 2019 to below 12,000 in April 2021. The Commission continues to work closely with the Greek authorities to ensure the timely delivery of the objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding and further improve the reception system.

Mr Yiannis Bournous
MP for Lesvos – Shadow Alternate Foreign Minister for European Affairs
By e-mail only: bournous@parliament.gr

Moreover, the Commission provides funding support and continues its coordination efforts under the ongoing voluntary relocation scheme. Since its start one year ago, more than 3,700 unaccompanied children, children with severe medical conditions and other vulnerabilities with their families have been relocated from Greece to other Member States and associated countries.

Under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the expedient identification of the correct procedure applicable to persons entering the EU will assist in determining swiftly whether asylum applicants are in need of international protection and ensure the swift return of those that do not fulfil the conditions.

Finally, as regards the new Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centres (MPRICs) which will replace the existing centres on the islands, the Greek authorities have confirmed that the residents of the new MPRICs will be allowed to enter and exit at will, as a system will be put in place with the use of access cards. Only, the pre-removal centres, for people who are subject to a return order, will be closed. The MPRICs will be constructed fully in line with the relevant EU acquis and standards.

The proposals put forward by the Commission in the Pact set in balance the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility and represent the only way to develop a sustainable, European approach to migration management. We must ensure everyone engages constructively into reaching a political compromise on the key elements of the Pact. This is in the interest of every Member State and of the Union as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

Ylva JOHANSSON

Electronically signed on 19/05/2021 18:02 (UTC+02) in accordance with article 11 of Commission Decision C(2020) 4482