



Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos during his visit to Idomeni, Greece

Brussels, 15 March 2016

Ladies and gentlemen,

What we see today in Idomeni should be the last chapter of a tragedy that must not be repeated.

We need to stop it.

Closing borders, playing the blame game and taking distance from the problem are obviously not the solutions.

At the same time, we have to stop migrant smugglers from undermining the legitimacy and implementation of our common rules, and from limitlessly exploiting vulnerable people.

Those who are here and in need of international protection should be urgently relocated, legally and safely.

Relocation should immediately take the dimensions of a humanitarian evacuation: we have already increased the pledges from Member States and now it is urgently time to deliver. In parallel, the European Asylum Support Office is supporting the enormous efforts made by the Greek authorities to directly accept and act on these pledges.

We need to reach 6000 relocations per month.

Until then, I fully support the Greek Government's efforts to inform and persuade these people to be transferred to reception centers, with decent living and sanitary conditions, until their legal transfer is organised.

The urgent needs of these people must be met immediately, whether they are in reception centers or here in Idomeni.

That is why the Commission has approved all emergency requests by Greece as a priority, with a total amount of €150 million. In fact, my services received an additional application for emergency funding yesterday, which they will assess by the end of the week and a retroactive effect for the amount that will be approved is foreseen.

In addition, 70 of the €510 million available under the Greek national programme has already been disbursed. The Commission's experts are in open and constant dialogue with the Greek authorities for the adaptation of national action programs to meet immediate needs. The disbursed funding must now be swiftly put to use by the Greek authorities.

As part of the emergency plan for Greece, concrete actions to address humanitarian needs will also start immediately.

The €700 million Emergency Assistance instrument to Member States has been approved by the Council today and will be immediately activated. The amending budget is expected to be rapidly adopted, and the Commission has already started preparatory actions to meet food, medical and health care needs.

Since Greece activated the Civil Protection Mechanism in December, 13 EU Member States and Norway have made offers of support, helping deliver over 87,000 items such as blankets, medical supplies, tents, beds and mattresses.

Over the weekend, the Netherlands delivered 12 minivans and 90 generators, the UK over 1,000 tents and France four sanitary containers, 12 sheltering containers and 5,000 water and fuel cans. I would like to thank the Member States for this!

On Monday, Luxembourg made an additional offer of support, including 30 generators, 750 bed mattresses, 300 chairs, 1,000 fuel and water cans, 5,000 pillows and 500 bunk beds.

This week Austria, Germany, Spain, Lithuania, Hungary, Norway and Sweden are expected to make additional deliveries of support.

Greece also needs more staff and experts on the ground. That is why, right here from here in Idomeni, I call on all Member States to positively respond to the new call of FRONTEX and EASO.

Let me hereby also express my deep admiration for the dedication and generosity of ordinary citizens and the work of non-governmental and international organizations.

Everyone is playing a different role in addressing this crisis. And those who have not yet taken their responsibilities must do so.

Order must return in this chaos, the consequences of which are mostly-but not only- felt by our fellow human beings: we see that, due to irregular migration flows, borders are closed, fences are being erected, and accusations are being made. The very idea of Europe itself is contested. And yet, Europe is the only solution.

I hope everyone realises that Greece has already made swift progress: almost all hotspots are functioning, all incoming migrants are being registered, irregular migrants are detained in order to be returned, while reception capacities are being increased.

However, in Greece, the humanitarian crisis is still a reality. And we can only solve it through massive relocations, along with an improved management of our common external borders and a better control of migratory flows.

In order to avoid the tragic and daily repetition of shipwrecks and the loss of lives across dangerous routes, we must create legal and safe pathways to Europe. It is the only logical and realistic alternative.

I hope that both on Thursday and Friday, the Summit will provide a breakthrough.

No one can remain on the side lines with this crisis unfolding right in front of us.

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