

Dear Mrs. Ursula von der Leyen,

We write to you to draw your attention to the continuing push-back incidents on the Greek-Turkey border and request your support in ending this most heinous practice which has so far claimed so many lives and ruined a lot more.

Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi said, at an EU meeting in early October 2021, that Greece would investigate reports that some of its officials were illegally pushing back migrants at the border after it was pressed by the EU to do so following an outcry from the international community over the increasing number of push-back claims.

Only a couple of weeks later, Murat 729, a decommissioned Turkish cargo ship carrying some 380 immigrants, including women and children, was towed away from Crete by the Greek coast guard, which responded to a distress call from the ship. Only after videos shot by the immigrants on board the ship started circulating on social media, the ship was finally brought to shore after 4 days and 500 miles sailing back and forth between Greece and Turkey.

According to The European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), “the number of pushbacks from Greece nearly doubled in 2021... and the number of arrivals to the islands is at the lowest in nine years with people pushed towards other, more deadly routes.”

The nationalities of the immigrants who have been pushed back by the Greek authorities reveals an even more concerning fact. While most of the immigrants seem to come from countries from Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the number of Turkish citizens within such immigrants has steeply increased following President Erdogan’s crackdown on the members of the Gülen movement and the Kurdish activists in the aftermath of the coup attempt in July 2016.

In the last few years, Turkey has turned into a country with one of the worst human rights records in the world. In the last 6 years, approximately 2 million Turkish citizens have been charged with terrorism offences and 512,000 of them have been prosecuted. 320,000 people have been convicted, and 131,000 people have been imprisoned. There are currently more than 30,000 Turkish citizens, including the sick, the elderly, the disabled and children, who are being held in Turkish prisons on grounds of bogus terrorism charges.

The Turkish nationals who are trying to flee Turkey are doing so in fear of persecution. Turkish asylum seekers who are pushed back by Greece, face immediate arrest, lengthy prison sentences, ill-treatment and torture.

OpenDemocracy has recently reported that "interviews and documents received from lawyers in Greece and Turkey, as well as from family members of victims and victims themselves allege that Greece carried out at least 233 illegal 'pushbacks' of Turkish nationals since May 2021 alone, compared to 98 push-backs tracked in 2019."

By pushing back Turkish citizens to Turkey where they are subjected to unlawful imprisonment, Greece has constantly been violating the international law of prohibition of refoulement as well as its many other international human rights obligations.

We therefore ask;

- the Greek government not to further delay the setting up/designation of the body which will be tasked with the investigation of push-back allegations which will include representatives of independent organisations.
- That all push-back incidents are thoroughly investigated, and those responsible are brought to justice.
- That access to asylum is ensured at the borders, and all procedural or geographical restrictions, either legal or practical, with regard to claiming asylum are lifted.

We also ask for your kind support to ensure that the above is done without further delay.

Signatories

- 1) **SIRA REGO** (Member of the European Parliament). Spain
- 2) **Dr. DIETMAR KÖSTER** (Member of the European Parliament). Germany
- 3) **Bettina VOLLATH** (Member of the European Parliament). Austria
- 4) **Thomas WAITZ** (Member of the European Parliament). Austria
- 5) **Tineke STRIK** (Member of the European Parliament). Netherlands
- 6) **CLAIRE BRICE-DELAJOUX** (Lecturer in public law - HDR, Paris-Saclay University (University of Evry), Director of the Master 2 Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Member of the Léon Duguit Research Center (CRLD) . France
- 7) **SYLVAIN THEVOZ** (Deputy of the Grand Council, Member of the Tax, Social, Petitions, Pardons Committee) Switzerland
- 8) **Elif ERALP** (Member of the Berlin House of Representatives). Germany
- 9) **Laurence FEHLMANN RIELLE** (Member of the Swiss Parliament/ National Council). Geneva
- 10) **Amma ASANTE** (Senior Researcher, Former member of Parliament The Netherlands). Amsterdam
- 11) **Ferat KOCAK** (Economist - Member of the Berlin House of Representatives - Spokesman for the left-wing fraction for anti-fascist politics and climate politics). Germany
- 12) **SIMONE SUSSKIND** (Former Brussels deputy and federal senator, Doctor Honoris of the ULB, Baroness, Founder of Actions in the Mediterranean). Belgium
- 13) **BENOIT PIEDBOEUF** (Federal MP and Group Leader, Mayor of the municipality of Tintigny, President of MR Luxembourg). Belgium
- 14) **ELS ROCHETTE** (MP for the Brussels-Capital region). Belgium
- 15) **Prof. Dr. Ides NICAISE** (Professor Emeritus with formal functions - Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at KU Leuven). Belgium
- 16) **Ingeborg BEUGEL** (Journalist, Dutch correspondent specialised in pushbacks/ criminalisation of refugees and aid workers and NGO's). Athens
- 17) **Mehmet CERIT** (Editor in chief of "De Kanttekening"). Netherlands
- 18) **Henri GOLDMAN** (Ex-editor-in-chief (1997-2020) of the magazine Politique). Brussels
- 19) **Nell BERGER** (Artist, Photographic work, Direction consultant). Netherlands
- 20) **Rabbi Lody B. van DE KAMP**, Amsterdam

Signatories

- 21) **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS E.V.**, BERLIN
- 22) **PEACE AND JUSTICE ASBL**, BRUSSELS
- 23) **INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE PLATFORM ASBL**, BRUSSELS
- 24) **SOLIDARITY WITH OTHERS AISBL**, BRUSSELS
- 25) **EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**, FRANKFURT AM MAIN
- 26) **COLLECTIF POUR LA DÉFENSE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME**, PARIS
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- 30) **EUROPEAN PROFESSIONALS NETWORK**, BRUSSELS
- 31) **BROKEN CHALK**, AMSTERDAM
- 32) **LONDON ADVOCACY**, LONDON
- 33) **HUMAN RIGHTS SOLIDARITY**, LONDON
- 34) **IVORIAN COMMUNITY OF GREECE**, ATHENS
- 35) **MIGRANT WOMEN ASSOCIATION MALTA**, MALTA
- 36) **PLATFORM INS**, AMSTERDAM
- 37) **THE NORTHERN IRELAND COUNCIL FOR RACIAL EQUALITY (NICRE)**, UNITED KINGDOM
- 38) **AUSTRALIAN INTERCULTURAL SOCIETY**, MELBOURNE
- 39) **SELIMIYE FOUNDATION**, AUSTRALIA
- 40) **ALTERA**, TORINO
- 41) **REVIBRA EUROPE**, BRAZIL
- 42) **VERZWEGEN TURKIJE**, NETHERLANDS
- 43) **BLUE STAR**, AUSTRALIA
- 44) **UNIVERSAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION**, PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA