

WARSAW, 4 October 2006

OSCE HDIM-WORKING SESSION 5

Humanitarian issues and other commitments

STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION

Greece, due to its geographical position, is affected by the problem of illegal immigration in a more acute way, than other European Union countries. Equally acute is the asylum problem. This situation obliges us to dedicate a much greater effort and more human and financial resources in tackling it.

Greece has been criticized in the recent past for granting asylum status only to a small number of applicants. Let me respond to this.

Any asylum seeker, who enters my country, is guaranteed a thorough examination of his application, is given the possibility to stay at the Special Reception Centers for Asylum Seekers, and enjoys many of the benefits granted to a recognized refugee.

In order to ensure full respect of asylum seeker's rights and dissuade incidents of discrimination, racism or xenophobia we have undertaken a systematic training and re-education of our competent officers.

When examining an asylum application the Greek authorities appropriately evaluate the risk the asylum seeker faces in the case of repatriation, and fully apply the "non refoulement" principle of the article 33 of the Geneva Convention of 1951.

Let me underline at this point that the delays occurred in the examination of the asylum applications in the past years were due to the massive submission of asylum applications by economic immigrants. These people were aiming at establishing themselves in Greece for economic reasons.

I would like now to inform you on some specific measures taken recently by the Greek authorities in this field.

1. A new computerized processing has been introduced for a speedy up the examination of the asylum application.
2. The committee which examines asylum applications at a second instance has doubled since a year ago the number of its meetings.

3. A Working Group has been established, consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Public Order and the United Nations High Commission for the Refugees, which convenes at least once a month, in order to examine issues relating to asylum applications.

4. An on going dialogue has been established between the Greek authorities and NGOs dealing with assistance to asylum seekers.

5. In cooperation with the Office of UNHCR in Athens, a special training program was implemented in 2005 for Police officers dealing with asylum applications.

6. Two European Union programs, under the name "Argonaut", on the joint training of Police and border police officers dealing with asylum applications, were also implemented all over the country.

As to the conditions of the Police detention centre:

1. The construction of a new detention center with a capacity of 600 was completed in Athens in 2005, which complies with the international standards.

2. Another such center for illegal immigrants will operate at the island of Samos, South Eastern Greece.

3. A circular on the technical standards of the Police detention places is being implemented, following the relative recommendations of the European Committee against Torture.

Finally, I wish to stress that the unabated intensity of the phenomenon of illegal immigration obliges all the countries of destination, especially the ones which, due to their geographical position, are the first to receive these people, to continuously upgrade the measures dedicated to tackle the problem.