



MINISTER OF SHIPPING,
MARITIME AFFAIRS & THE AEGEAN

Mr Niels Muižnieks
Commissioner for Human
Rights
Council of Europe
F-67075
Strasbourg

Piraeus, 28 January 2014
Ref.: 61

Dear Commissioner,

I am writing to you in order to express my deepest aggravation for the lives lost at sea during the Farmakonisi tragic incident. Despite the continuous and vigorous efforts of the Hellenic Coast Guard to safeguard our Southeastern European Sea borders while protecting and rescuing the human lives in peril, human lives were lost and such an incident is a mere tragedy.

Unfortunately, this tragedy highlights the severe migratory pressures at the European external borders in the Southeast Mediterranean area. As of August 2012, the situation in the East Aegean Sea has deteriorated. In particular, until 31 December 2013 the Hellenic Coast Guard authorities at the East Aegean islands area has handled in total 615 cases of unauthorized blue-border crossings - involving 10.902 non-European nationals 45% from Syria and 29% of which (3.120 individuals) were rescued by the Hellenic Coast Guard officers. In addition, during the same period, the Hellenic Coast Guard recorded the largest dispersion of incidents over the East Aegean seafloor, covering an area of over 2.000 km from north to south and encompassing all the intervening islands.

"No life lost at sea" is the core dogma of the Hellenic Coast Guard. In response to the latest incident at Farmakonisi, we have immediately ordered the competent judicial authorities to investigate the circumstances of the incident and the conditions of the rescue. Currently, the competent District Attorney has pressed charges only to the master of the boat that was carrying the illegal immigrants.

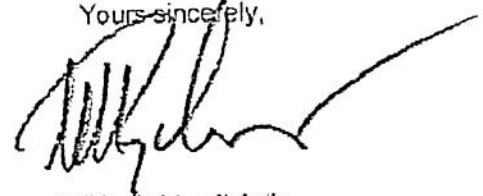
Having said that, such incidents as the Farmakonisi tragedy stipulate the need for a common European strategy and collaboration at a European level in order to efficiently address the issue of the migratory illegal flows while safeguarding the right to life and humane treatment.



Bearing in mind our long-standing collaboration, we are ready to provide you with any additional information related to this tragic incident in order to establish a new platform that will further facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, with a view to avoid any misleading misconceptions and early conclusions based on dubious sources of information.

Incidents as the Farmakonisi tragedy, attributed to the issue of the illegal migratory flows, shall be the last one. It seems to us that synergy and collaboration is the only way forward to put an end to such perils at our common European borders.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Miltiades Varvitsiotis', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Miltiades Varvitsiotis