



REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR
MINISTER'S OFFICE

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16 March 2021

Dear Commissioner,

I refer to your letter dated 10/03/2021 concerning a number of matters pertaining to the asylum and reception procedures in Cyprus and I inform you the following:

(a) Readmission of boat arrivals from Lebanon

Cyprus as the southeasternmost point of the EU, is facing huge challenges concerning arrivals of irregular migrants on the island. Over 70% of our migratory influx results from flows that arrive either, directly from Turkey by boat or via the occupied area through the "Green Line" with the number of asylum seekers and holders of protection accounting for 4% of our population.

Concerning the readmission of boat arrivals from Lebanon, which it is mentioned in your letter, it should be mentioned that during the first 8 days of September 2020, Cyprus was facing a new trend regarding irregular arrivals of migrants on the island. Specifically, 10 vessels departed from Lebanon, which totally transferred 347 irregular migrants to Cyprus. Consequently, it was rapidly decided to initiate negotiations with Lebanon and was agreed that 6 out of the 10 vessels carrying Lebanese nationals should be returned to Lebanon. Taking into consideration and respecting the provisions of the relevant EU and international law, Cyprus authorities prevented the irregular entry into Cyprus of Lebanese migrants that did not request international protection and managed to return them with safety to Lebanon. It should be noted that 24 nationals of Lebanon, were disembarked due to the fact that they applied for international protection.

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Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that during 2020, a total of 682 Syrian and Lebanese migrants arrived irregularly on the island, or were detected at the sea borders attempting to disembark irregularly. In particular, 472 migrants landed on the island, out of which 400 of them were Syrian nationals and 72 Lebanese. 210 Lebanese nationals who had been detected at the sea borders, returned to Lebanon since they stated that their destination was not Cyprus but Italy.

Cyprus authorities are aware and respect the provisions of the EU *aquis*, which were taken into consideration during the negotiations leading to the relevant Readmission Agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon

(b) Adjustment of normal procedures of Reception Centres due to COVID-19

In the framework of the Government's efforts to effectively manage the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the normal procedures of the First Reception Centre 'Pournara' and the Reception and Accommodation Centre for Applicants for International Protection in Kofinou, have been adjusted in order to meet the needs arising from this unprecedented situation. According to a relevant Ministerial decree, the exit from the two Reception Centres was prohibited during the existence of similar measures for the whole population. The specific decree provided the Minister of Interior with the discretion to allow the exit of residents for humanitarian reasons (such as those falling under the category of vulnerable persons or who experience health issues). During that period, arrangements were made, so children residing in 'Kofinou' were able to attend their classes virtually. At the same time, our efforts focused on ensuring an adequate standard of living for the residents in both Centres but also appropriate working conditions for the staff. In cooperation with the Ministry of Health we ensure access to adequate testing and healthcare for applicants in the two Centres, concerning both new arrivals and current residents.

Medical staff has been posted at both centres, while the operation of 'Pournara' and 'Kofinou' Centres is being adjusted depending on the course of the pandemic and the relevant Governmental decisions. At the same time a safe zone for vulnerable persons including UAMS is being constructed at 'Pournara' centre while Social Welfare Officers have been posted at the centre for matters pertaining to UAMs and other vulnerable applicants. Vulnerability officers of the Asylum Service are also at the site for performing vulnerability screening of the residents. It should be mentioned that EASO and UNHCR staff continued to provide their services and support throughout this period. Finally, it should also be mentioned that according to the most recent Ministerial

decree, both Reception Centres have returned to normal operation and arrangements have been made for the gradual exit of the residents.

It should also be mentioned that the Ministerial Council decided the use of a Hotel as a quarantine area for the new arrivals which are tested positive to COVID-19. The appropriate nursing staff is posted at the premises for the provision of the necessary healthcare to the applicants referred there. Since 8th March 2021, exit from Pournara and Kofinou is allowed for all residences provided that they undergo a negative rapid test.

(c) De-registration of NGOs

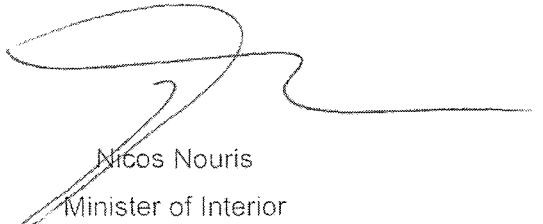
The House of Representative enacted in 2017 a new law referred to as the Societies and Institutions and other related Matters Law. All existing NGOs established and registered under the previous law, were required to amend their articles of associations and take other actions, such as prepare financial accounts and inform the registrar for the members of the board of directors until 31st of December 2019.

From the 6500 approx. NGOs, 3500 complied within the time limit set. For those that have not complied until the end of 2019, i.e., after 2.5 years, a new opportunity for compliance was given until October 2020. 2200 approx. NGOs did not comply. The huge majority were inactive NGOs. Some active NGOs were among them as well.

These NGOs have lost their legal ability to operate. From 2020 cases there were approx. 60 appeals lodged, within the 30 days that the law has provided. The General Registrar has annulled the decision of the Registrar for 23 cases. There is only one case in front of the Supreme Court.

Please note that the new law introduces elements of transparency and accountability for the operations of NGOs in compliance both to FATF guidelines for protecting NGOs for financing terrorism abuse and also with EU 5th directive for the prevention and supervision of money laundering.

I remain at your disposal for any further clarifications required.



Nicos Nouris
Minister of Interior