



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
Ministry of Migration & Asylum

The Minister

Athens, July 26, 2023

Our ref: 364935

Ms Dunja Mijatovic
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe
Strasbourg, France
By email

Dear Commissioner,

On behalf of Prime Minister Mitsotakis, I would like to thank you for your letter.

At the outset, please allow me to reiterate our deepest respect for the mission of the Council of Europe in upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Values that we consider, to a large extent, as a given in the European continent; and that constitute the cornerstone of Greek domestic and foreign policy.

The recent tragedy in the Mediterranean is a reminder of the fact that what we in Europe consider as the norm, does not apply to a significant part of the world. Desperate people undertake perilous journeys of irregular migration, falling victim to criminal smuggling syndicates that overload unseaworthy vessels on shores beyond the reach of law enforcement.

This recent tragedy has fed a frenzy of criticism, which, in many cases, is politically motivated by advocates of an “open border” agenda, preaching that all such tragedies can be averted by increasing Search and Rescue (SAR) capacity. This is not true. As long as criminal networks put people’s lives at risk, more lives will be lost. To save lives, we need to address the root causes of the problem, break the business model of smugglers and increase legal pathways.

Over the last years, the Hellenic Coast Guard has conducted thousands of SAR operations; having managed to rescue hundreds of thousands. Regretfully, I note that this fact is often overlooked.

Saving lives at risk is the top priority of the Hellenic Coast Guard which is confirmed by the 245.000 migrants who have been rescued during the period of 2015-2023 in more than 1800 SAR operations.

Saving lives at risk is the Hellenic Coast Guard's operating guideline, which initiated the SAR operation undertaken in international waters off the coast of Pylos, during the tenure of the interim Government.

The survivors were indeed transported to the Malakasa reception center, where they received all the privileges of an asylum seeker and benefited from fast-track asylum processes. In addition, the Greek Dublin Unit initiated processing family reunification requests, sending them to the Authorities of the concerned EU Member States. Such requests are still pending.

As a free society, we have the greatest respect for the role of the press and take constructive criticism very seriously. Therefore, an independent judicial investigation has been launched, the results of which are currently pending. Furthermore, the Naval Court Prosecutor has been instructed by the Supreme Court Prosecutor to investigate the conduct of the Coast Guard during the said SAR operation.

On a final note, we welcome the important role of civil society. Our Government cooperates extensively with a significant number of NGOs that provide valuable expertise and knowledge; especially with regards to integration. We cherish this expanding cooperation. However, as is the case with all legal entities operating in Greece, NGOs and their members must comply with the law.

I remain at your disposal.

Yours sincerely,



Dimitris Kairidis