



REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

PRESIDENTIAL PALACE
The President

Nicosia, 25 October 2024

Dear Mr. Commissioner,

I refer to your letter dated 23/10/2024, concerning matters pertaining to asylum procedures in Cyprus, as well as alleged human rights violations by the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus, and I would like to inform you the following:

The Republic of Cyprus, as a front-line State in close proximity to the turbulent Middle East has been facing major challenges in recent years regarding irregular migration. Thus, the Republic has made considerable efforts to manage migratory flows, while at the same time we strive to maintain a viable asylum system. The commitment of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus to provide sufficient international protection to asylum seekers and to comply with the EU *acquis*, is demonstrated by an array of facts. In particular, the Republic, among others, built exemplary reception centres, created the International Protection Administrative Court, and established a Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection. Furthermore, Cyprus has granted international protection to 18,000 individuals over the last ten years and is currently in the process of formulating a comprehensive strategy for the integration of legal migrants.

As you mentioned in your letter, efficient monitoring in order to combat illegal migration, detect and prevent threats to national security and public order but also to prevent the instrumentalization of migrants by Turkey, has been a priority for the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. To this effect, we have been utilising unprecedented resources and human power for the surveillance of both our borders as well as the 'Green Line'. The enhancement of surveillance was deemed necessary when it became apparent that smuggling networks have been facilitating the movement of migrants from Turkey to the occupied areas of Cyprus and through the 'Green Line' to the government-controlled areas. Against this backdrop, and always in conformity with our obligations under international and European law, the Government of Cyprus will make every effort to prevent the normalisation of irregular crossings through the 'Green Line'. If this route is normalised, criminal networks will increasingly use this passage to smuggle thousands of irregular migrants into Cyprus. In this regard, our Government is determined to dismantle such criminal networks that exploit the human need and pain.

Mr Michael O'Flaherty,
Commissioner for the Human Rights
of the Council of Europe



With respect to the individuals currently in the buffer zone I would like to reiterate that we do not overlook the humanitarian aspect of the matter. In this respect, we have been providing supplies and healthcare. At the same time, we cannot allow the establishment of a pathway for migrants from Turkey and the occupied areas through the 'Green Line'. In any case, I would like to assure you that we will resolve the matter within the next few weeks. Moreover, I would like to reject allegations of use of violence or excessive use of force against migrants.

I also reject allegations regarding the performance of pushbacks at sea. The Republic of Cyprus carries out naval patrols outside its territorial sea, in full compliance with international law, the law of the sea and human rights. This is confirmed by the fact that no search and rescue incidents took place since the commencement of the aforementioned naval patrols.

Over the past years, Cyprus has received a disproportionate number of Syrian nationals due to the long-standing crisis in Syria. However, because of the heavy migratory flows, the viability of our asylum system has been severely strained. In order to safeguard the viability of our asylum system, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus decided to temporarily suspend the examination of asylum application submitted by Syrian nationals. Nevertheless, it should be clarified that asylum applications by Syrians are being received, while they enjoy all the rights envisaged for asylum seekers under the Refugee Law (e.g. access to education, healthcare, access to labour market etc). It should also be stressed that approximately 14,000 Syrians have already been granted international protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection) over the last decade.

The Republic of Cyprus has always been a law-abiding State. Therefore, we have been closely working with international organisations, including the Council of Europe, with a view to safeguarding international law and human rights. In this respect, we are keen on continuing our cooperation with you so as to fulfil our common goals.

Yours sincerely,

Nikos Christodoulides