

Ref: CommHR/sf/042-2019

Mr. Michalis Chrysochoidis
Minister of Citizen Protection of Greece

Mr. Giorgos Koumoutsakos
Alternate Minister for Migration Policy

Strasbourg, 25 November 2019

Dear Ministers,

Further to the constructive dialogue we initiated during my recent visit to Greece, I should like to follow up on certain issues relating to the reception of migrants, including asylum seekers.

These issues stem from the announcements made on 20 November 2019 by the Greek government's spokesperson, Stelios Petsas, and Deputy Defence Minister, Alkiviadis Stefanis, on new migration-related measures the government intends to take. As you stated during our meeting in Athens, the priority will be given to the decongestion of the islands. I recognise this to be an important first stage of this process. However, several aspects of the government's plan raise questions on which I hope you can provide clarifications.

I understand that this plan consists in two successive stages, the first of which will see the transfer of 20,000 people from the Aegean islands to hotels or to reception facilities – both existing and new -- on the mainland. I would appreciate receiving more information about these facilities and in particular whether they will be closed or open.

As part of the second stage, I understand that the existing open reception and identification centres on the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos and Chios will be closed down and that new closed facilities will be built there (with the existing facilities on the islands of Kos and Leros being converted from open to closed facilities). Each of these five closed facilities, with a total initial capacity of 18,000, would include both a reception and identification centre and a pre-removal centre.

It would be useful if you could clarify whether the government intends to move all the people who have not yet been transferred to the mainland at the time of their opening to the new closed centres, and if all new arrivals will be housed in these closed facilities.

More generally, I would appreciate receiving information about the reasons why the Greek government has opted for closed rather than open reception and identification centres, as well as about the deprivation of liberty regime that will be applicable to these new reception and identification centres. In view especially of the large numbers of persons involved, I am also interested in learning more about the safeguards that the Greek government intends to put in place in order to ensure that detention is used as a measure of last resort in each individual case and only for as short a period as necessary. Furthermore, with considerable numbers of vulnerable people, including children, arriving on the Aegean islands, I would also appreciate details about the government's plans as regards alternatives to detention on the islands.

Finally, noting that the implementation of the proposed changes will take some time and that people will remain in and around the existing facilities on the Aegean islands in the meantime, I would be grateful if you could inform me of any progress regarding immediate measures to improve humanitarian conditions, especially the distribution of food, shelter appropriate for the winter, access to health care and sanitary facilities.

I look forward to receiving your reply and continuing a constructive dialogue on this and all other human rights related issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dunja Mijatović', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dunja Mijatović