

## Material Solidarity Discussion

### Greece

The EU recognizes the need to establish an area of freedom, security and justice open to those forced by circumstances to legitimately seek protection in the European Union. Nevertheless the EU also recognizes that there must be solidarity towards member states which are faced with massive influxes of asylum seekers.

The question is how does a country deal with these pressures on a **practical** level, when they exceed the capacity and resources of the country in question? There is value in examining the problems of a country which is currently faced with these very pressures.

Greece, mainly because of its extensive land and sea borders is the main entry point into the EU for thousands of irregular migrants who mainly originate from Africa, Asia and parts of Eastern Europe. The Dublin II regulation undoubtedly adds more pressure on Greece because of its geographical position.

In order to emphasize the magnitude of the pressure felt because of these high numbers we need not look further than the last statistics provided by FRONTEX of the first 7 months of 2010. In this period, 17,787 irregular migrants were apprehended at the Greek Turkish land border which constitutes an increase (at this particular border) of 289% in comparison with the same period in 2009<sup>1</sup> Frontex estimates that during this 7 month period 82% of the total entries of the European Union entered through Greece.<sup>2</sup> According to the Greek border police an average of 250 irregular migrants enter the country daily. It is not surprising that the numbers of applications for asylum are equally high, making Greece the 6<sup>th</sup> highest recipient of asylum requests in the EU.<sup>3</sup>

The Greek government in September 2009 recognized the inadequacies of the asylum system in Greece and launched a reform of the system bearing in mind the lack of adequate laws, procedures and services for those seeking protection in the country. This 'general overhaul' is slowly being put in place.

In short, the reforms aim to establish screening centres in the main parts of the country where irregular migrants will be screened and directed to the various services and centres, depending on whether they wish to seek asylum, whether they belong to a vulnerable group or are unaccompanied minors, or whether they are economic migrants. The reform aims to create an efficient and fair asylum system by ultimately setting up an asylum service independent of the

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<sup>1</sup> FRONTEX Weekly Analytical Report – JO Poseidon 2010

<sup>2</sup> The sharp increase is only at the land border with Turkey. There has been a decrease of entries by sea, in this same period (-73%) but according to frontex the number of irregular migrants is still high on the whole.

<sup>3</sup> According to Eurostat for the period of February 2009-February 2010

police. Because the establishment of this service might take some time the government has planned a transitional phase whereby an Interim Presidential Decree will regulate the legal and procedural problems that asylum seekers have faced in the recent past. This transitional Presidential decree includes the reinstatement of the appeals procedure, and the establishment of 5 appeal committees, 3 of which will examine backlog cases and two which will examine new appeals.

On a more practical level, Greece has recently drawn up an Action Plan which aims to outline **concretely** what needs to be done in order to implement the above reforms within a given time-frame. The Action Plan provides in depth information on the infrastructural, human resources, and technological needs of the country in order to successfully carry out the reforms. It also outlines other needs such as expertise, training, and general support.

Given the pressure Greece is under, EU financial and physical solidarity assistance is apparent. For example, financial assistance can help alleviate the country in its efforts to construct the necessary buildings for the reception of asylum seekers and for the services provided to them. It can also help in the building of Screening Centres which is a necessary step in identifying those in need of asylum. Furthermore financial assistance can help in providing the necessary services to asylum seekers such as interpretation, legal aid etc. Physical solidarity can also help through the redistribution or relocation of asylum seekers which would help Greece in terms of lowering the caseload in a country where the numbers are high.

**Material solidarity** in the meaning of operational support, the sharing of good practices, training, and the exchange of experts and teams of experts, is also very important for countries such as Greece facing particular pressure. Although the pressure on Greece at present is significant, this does not mean that the country has expertise and experience in facing the challenges that it faces. Indeed, Greece like other Southern European is a country from which many of its citizens have traditionally immigrated. Greece has only recently changed to a destination country, and a country of asylum. Support from other EU countries which have had experience in their histories of receiving asylum seekers can therefore be of crucial help in assisting Greece in the challenges it is facing.

In the present Greek experience the biggest needs in terms of material solidarity have been identified as follows:

#### 1. Human Resources:

- ✓ Teams for screening Asylum seekers at the border
- ✓ Teams for registering Asylum seekers under the new procedures prescribed in the new Presidential decree
- ✓ Support staff for the administrative support of the Appeal Committees under the new procedures prescribed under the new PD
- ✓ Interpreters for Asylum seekers



- ✓ Staff IT support under new procedures prescribed in the new PD
- ✓ Staff support in Dublin II Office (for preparing proof and evidence for transfer requests, processing transfer requests, replying to other states in given time frame)
- ✓ Monitoring and quality control task force to oversee the process

## 2. Case-work Management

- ✓ The government in its action plan has requested expertise on how to handle the backlog of pending asylum cases which will be examined under the new procedures. EU expertise on case-work management would be very helpful in order to clear the backlog as quickly and efficiently as possible This will help in establishing a system of prioritization of cases (depending on the country of origin, the date of the application, by the vulnerability of the applicants etc.)

## 3. Information Systems and infrastructure

- ✓ Provision of finger-print and palm scanners
- ✓ Expertise in using finger-print and palm scanners
- ✓ Expertise and assistance in the setting up and use of an electronic registration system for asylum seekers
- ✓ Expertise in statistical data systems and management

## 4. Training and expertise

- ✓ Training on screening irregular migrants and for registering and interviewing asylum seekers
- ✓ Training for eligibility officers
- ✓ Country of information expertise and training
- ✓ Training for interpreters
- ✓ Training on statistical management
- ✓ Human Rights related and EU Asylum law training for all relevant staff
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluation training
- ✓ Training for trainers on selected above (in order to build capacity)

As can be seen from the above, material solidarity is crucial for countries facing 'particular pressures' not only to help alleviate this pressure in the short-term, but also to ensure that the efforts are **sustainable**. Supporting countries through sending qualified staff and experts for example can provide immediate relief, but the expertise and knowledge they share can be of even more benefit.

However, as seen in the Greek experience material solidarity can only be effective if it is coupled with physical and financial solidarity due to the extent of the pressures felt especially in this time of economic crisis.





**Discussion points:**

Q: What exactly do countries see as 'material solidarity', and how do they think they can assist practically?

Q: As the CEAS is not ready yet how can an organized way in which support (such as support teams) be sent in a co-ordinated way?

Q: Could ad-hoc EU offices in a given country (facing particular pressures) be the way forward which would organize assistance and training?

