

Press Release

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"Greece must uphold all asylum-seekers' rights" says Commissioner Hammarberg in a new report

Strasbourg, 04.02.2009 – "The situation of asylum seekers in Greece is critical. The authorities must urgently improve the asylum system, guaranteeing the full respect of international human rights standards. The problems in Greece also call for further efforts to coordinate European policies on mixed migration."

Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, presented today his report on a visit to Greece carried out from 8 to 10 December 2008. The report makes an overview of the main features of the Greek asylum system, identifies shortcomings and set concrete recommendations to improve the protection of asylum-seekers' human rights.

While commending the recent legislation aimed at providing a comprehensive protection regime for asylum seekers, the Commissioner stresses the need to improve refugee protection and access to the asylum procedure, especially in border areas such as the Evros department. "There are grave and systemic deficiencies in the Greek asylum practice" he said. "This situation puts at risk the fundamental right to seek asylum". He also calls upon the authorities to effectively incorporate into asylum practice the international standards on foreign nationals' detention and forced return and to revisit the existing readmission agreement with Turkey.

Commissioner Hammarberg is also concerned about insufficient reception capacity for refugee applicants, including minors. "Living conditions in certain centres for irregular migrants are unacceptable. Migrants, including asylum-seekers and unaccompanied minors, must enjoy humane reception conditions. Special attention should be paid to children's needs."

The report underlines the need to decentralise the asylum procedure and enhance the training of human resources involved in the processing of asylum applications. It also points at the lack of sufficient interpretation and legal aid for asylum seekers and recommends effective measures to ensure the independence and the effectiveness of second instance in the asylum procedure.

Finally, the Commissioner recommends that the Greek authorities ensure the protection of migrants' physical security in the mined areas of Evros. "I am deeply concerned at the existence of these mined areas and at the significant number of foreign nationals who have lost their lives or limbs on the minefields" he said. "Greece has an obligation to complete the clearance of the mined areas and to effectively protect migrants' physical security. The authorities must also provide a prompt and generous assistance to all mine victims, especially migrants".

The report, together with the Greek authorities' response, a [photo gallery](#) and a video release are available on the [Commissioner's website](#).

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