

Ref. CommDH 001 (2014)

## Greece must end collective expulsions

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Strasbourg, 14/1/2014 – “The large number of reported collective expulsions by Greece of migrants, including a large number of Syrians fleeing war violence, and allegations of ill-treatment of migrants by members of the coast guard and of the border police raise serious human rights concerns. I call on the Greek authorities to carry out effective investigations into all recorded incidents and take all necessary measures in order to end and prevent recurrence of such practices”, said Nils Muižnieks, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, releasing today a [letter](#) sent on 5 December, 2013 to the Greek Ministers of Public Order and Citizen Protection, Mr Nikolaos Dendias, and of Shipping and the Aegean, Mr Miltiadis Varvitsiotis.

The Commissioner notes the recent adoption of legislative measures aimed at protecting migrants’, including minors’, access to health and social care in initial reception centres. However, he underscores that collective expulsions of foreign nationals violate international and European human rights law and raise very serious issues of compatibility with the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement*, enshrined in the UN Refugee Convention, by which Greece is bound.

“In addition to being incompatible with international human rights and refugee law, collective expulsions of migrants are also ineffective, given that people facing desperate situations cannot really be prevented from migrating. To uphold its human rights obligations, Greece has to radically change its migration policy and practice. This is all the more necessary now that Greece has taken on additional responsibilities by holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. I therefore welcome as a first positive step the Greek authorities’ ongoing investigations on push-backs and alleged ill-treatment of migrants, as well as their commitment to share with me the outcome of these investigations.”

The replies by the Ministers are available [here](#).

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The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent, non-judicial institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in the 47 member states of the Organisation. Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Mr Nils Muižnieks, took up his function on 1 April 2012