



**Statement of Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection of Greece Mr. Nikolaos Dendias  
101<sup>st</sup> Session of the IOM Council  
Geneva, 27 November 2012**

**Greek Policies on Migration and Asylum and the strategic cooperation with  
the International Organisation for Migration**

Mr. Director General  
Your Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for my country Greece and for me personally to address the 101<sup>st</sup> Session of the IOM Council at a moment when my country faces one of its most challenging periods both in the field of the economic and the migration crisis.

I wish to underline that the current Government is determined. We are in a reversing course. We have demonstrated the determination of the Greek people to correct past mistakes, to fight populism and extremism, to make a spectacular come back.

Countries like Greece, being on the European border line, understand better than others the common security issues. Security is not only about defending oneself from outside dangers. It is also about promoting stability beyond your borders. Proactive policies of stability can achieve much more if they are jointly pursued on a multilateral level, than on an individual level by each member state.

The Greek Government is establishing an effective, humane oriented response to the current migration challenges including the need to combat irregular migration and to address the situation of vulnerable migrants. We have been working hand in hand with IOM in order to promote migration policy and programmes that will benefit both our societies and migrants and will contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

On July 2012 we signed with IOM a Grant Agreement for the implementation of voluntary returns, including reintegration measures.

To date, approximately 11,100 migrants have registered to IOM Greece an interest in returning to their respective countries of origin. On average, the mission is registering over 70 migrants per day mainly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco and Iraq.

Bearing in mind the overwhelming number of migrants wishing to return, we have agreed with IOM Greece to return an additional 3,000 third-country nationals by June 30, 2013 thus increasing the original number from 7,000 migrants to 10,000 migrants.

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I ask for your kind attention in order to present, in summary of course, the overall Greek strategy on Asylum and Migration Policy.

In 2010 Greece adopted the Greek Action Plan on Migration Management and Asylum within the framework of the Common European Asylum System. This Action Plan was transposed in our National Legislation and since August 2012 its implementation has been speeded up.

Facing the immense challenge of a large flow of irregular migrants in the recent years, we have proceeded to the reinforcement of our external borders, of Europe's eastern external borders, strengthening the Evros border, implementing electronic surveillance at the Evros border operational centres, completing the border fence and deploying patrol boats to strengthen river patrols. These actions have resulted in a more than 90% decrease of entries of irregular migrants.

We are launching a strategic cooperation with the Ministry of Mercantile Marine to further secure the sea borders where there is a rise in the irregular border crossings.

At the same time we restored security in the city centres through an ongoing operation in the centre of Athens and Patras, the results of which, from a security point of view, are obvious.

One of the most significant steps forward is the establishment and functioning of the new Asylum Service which will be fully operational in the first quarter of 2013. This new Service will be independent and will be operated by civil servants who are being actually trained by specialists in the field with the cooperation of UNHCR and EASO, the European Asylum Support Office. Being aware that we should expedite the old appeals files – the called backlog – we have formed a special task force of 90 cadets who updated the existing database and archived the non-active cases. 20 new additional committees are being created.

The new Asylum Service is being complemented by the new First Reception Centre with the mission to manage all irregular migrants entering illegally into Greece. This Service will be fully functioning in the first semester of 2013 and will have the sole task of screening irregular migrants to identify their identity and nationality, to register them, to provide, if needed, medical and psychological support, to inform them on their obligations and rights, especially on their right to asylum and international protection. Special care is taken for vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, single-parent families and migrants with health issues.

Unfortunately, not all irregular migrants fall under the scope of asylum protection and/or the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration IOM programmes. An important number of irregular migrants, being exploited by traffickers, arrive in Greece with promises of a better future seeking an employment or wishing to travel to other Member States of the European Union. Based on the European Dublin Regulation and on the agreed Readmission Agreements, Greece is obliged to follow return procedures.

As we may know we experience a very low return rate due to difficulties with foreign consular offices. This creates the need for higher capacity in pre-removal centres and bottlenecks in the return process. Thus, we are establishing new Pre Removal Centres in Macedonia, North Aegean and Attica gradually replacing old centres that did not satisfy basic suitability conditions, respecting the provisions of the European Directive on Returns. Thus by the end of April 2013 the

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total capacity of the Pre Removal Centres will be brought up to a number of 7.000 from the current capacity of 3.700.

Another step forward in view of maximising the strategic planning in the implementation of the Greek Action Plan on Migration and Asylum, the relevant Greek authorities have submitted to the European Commission concrete proposals to enable the Member-States to better target their assistance and proceed rapidly on a matching exercise. Based on the positive results and experience of the above mentioned actions we took the last months, the Greek Action Plan will be revised and will be submitted to the European Commission, to the Member-States and to our partners before the end of this year.

As I underlined, one of our strategic partners is the International Organisation for Migration. The on-going political and economic challenges in Greece have resulted in considerable alterations to the migration landscape of the country, affecting both governmental structures and key stakeholders dealing with migration as well as the number of migrants entering the country.

Thus, recently we have agreed with IOM to further promote our successful cooperation and expand it to the field of vulnerable migrants who represent an increasing cause of concern in Greece.

The Greek Government in cooperation with IOM Greece will build a network of all key stakeholders that will assist in supporting the establishment of two new reception centres that will provide care and services to irregular migrants who are especially vulnerable.

More specifically, we are working on the rapid functioning of one centre that will provide shelter and services to unaccompanied minors whilst a second will be used to accommodate irregular migrants who are vulnerable such as victims of trafficking, single-parent families and migrants with health issues. The operation of the shelters will meet the criteria set out by national and European legislation, as well as by IOM's best practice recommendations.

Last but not least, in order to deal with dangerous and racist attitudes observed in the Greek society, the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection proceeds in the establishment of Special Departments in the Police Directorates of Athens and Thessaloniki to deal and prevent racist attacks and to investigate immediately all relevant complaints. The Presidential Decree has taken into consideration proposals of the National Committee for Human Rights.

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I wish to assure that we are determined to present a success story in all the fields. I wish to underline though that we cannot succeed alone. We appeal to all partners to move on hand by hand to increase human capabilities, enlarge the scope of human choices, and create a safe and secure environment where citizens can live with dignity and equality.

Thank you very much for your attention.