



L'Association européenne pour la défense des droits et des libertés  
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**Mr. Felipe González Morales**, Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants,  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Jan.07, 2021, Strasbourg

Dear Mr. Felipe González Morales,

We are writing to you from ASSEDEL, a Strasbourg-based human rights advocacy association on the call for your forthcoming report on the human rights of migrants to the 47<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council. The mission of ASSEDEL, *L'Association européenne pour la défense des droits et des libertés*, is to disseminate, promote, and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international level. ASSEDEL board of directors consists of lawyers, academics, and human rights activists.

Considering the Human Rights Council decision to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, and on the decision to request and receive information from relevant sources, including migrants themselves and their families on violations of the human rights of migrants, we would like to inform you about the pushback incidents imposed by Greece to Turkish asylum seekers and report two specific incidents from Maritsa River, the borderline between Greece and Turkey.

An overgrowing humanitarian crisis taking place at the Aegean Sea and the banks of the Maritsa River. The asylum seekers who want to free themselves from the current Turkish regime cross the Aegean Sea or the Maritsa River. However, in violation of international law, Greece refuses asylum seekers in need of security and hands them over to Turkish officials. Turkish regime under groundless accusations has caused tens of thousands of individuals and families unable to live in the country. They cancel their diplomas, block their access to work, even do not let them have a

basic life. After the coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016, it has become impossible to express an opinion against the regime. Anyone suspected of his/her loyalty to the regime was put in prison,

accused of being or supporting terrorism. Hundreds of media outlets were shut down and the remaining print, visual and social media were turned into a choir of the regime. Turkey currently is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest prison for journalists in the world, after China. While working as a professor at the university, some academics have become farmers since July 2016. These people do not even know what they are accused of. The regime has made its definition of terrorism and jailed teachers, doctors, journalists, intellectuals, opinion leaders, and shopkeepers. The alternative to ill-treatment, imprisonment, and torture for these individuals and families is to leave the country. However, many of them have been banned from doing this. Those who have a passport cannot use them. Since they have no other alternatives, their last resort is to flee the country. Individuals under these pressures try to reach Greece by crossing the Aegean Sea or the Maritsa River to protect themselves and their families. Many do not intend to settle in Greece. They mostly see this country as a transit station.

The Greek side, in violation of international immigration laws, forcibly send these individuals and families back from their lands and hand them over to the Turkish authorities. This surrender takes place in two ways: the boats of those passing through the Aegean Sea are tied to the boats of the Greek officials and taken to the Turkish coast. In the second case, when asylum seekers crossing the Maritsa River by boat reach inside Greece, a group of policemen first meets them. Then, ski-masked people emerge. Before or after claiming their intention for asylum, these people are forced into closed-vans and gathered at the banks of Maritsa River. Finally, they are forcibly taken to Turkey side by ski-masked people. After a while, they are noticed by Turkish border patrols, taken to a police station, arrested, and sent to prison the same day.

Greece's border pushbacks are followed and reported by leading European news outlets. According to the report of [Independent](#), the number of pushed back individuals by September 2020 was over 300. The [Euronews Turkish section](#) covers this tragedy and publishes [a video by German Der Spiegel](#). Push-back incidents are no-surprise to [Greek media](#), too. Forensic Architecture, London University, announced [the video of the news published in Euronews](#) about the experiences of an elementary school teacher. The video was prepared with the contribution of HumanRights360, a Greek-based human rights association. [The footage](#) duly explains the tragic experience of the female schoolteacher at Greek borders. Also, [Zübeyir Koculu](#), a freelance journalist from Greece for Euronews covers Greece pushback incidents on his Twitter account.

After summarizing the general situation, we would like to report two recent incidents (Page 4, Page 5) to your attention. The persons in these documents are currently jailed in Turkey. We will cover their names and other personal information about their identities for security reasons. But in case of a request, the original documents can be presented to your attention.

We firmly believe that freedom is not a privilege, but the most fundamental human right. Most of the current Turkish asylum seekers are educated individuals. There are PhDs, masters, and college graduates among them. They take risks and dangers, leaving all their past and lives behind for their freedom.

To prevent possible future pushback incidents and human rights violations, our expectations from the United Nations Human Rights Council are as follows:

- The Special Rapporteur may pay a visit to Greece to deliver the necessary infringement messages to the Greek authorities.
- The Special Rapporteur can ask the Greek authorities for a satisfactory explanation about these allegations and these statements can be published on the Human Rights Council website.
- The Special Rapporteur may request joint action by contacting other international bodies sensitive to the issue (i.e., EU Commissioner for Human Rights).

As the ASSEDEL, L'Association européenne pour la défense des droits et des libertés in Strasbourg, we thank you for providing us the opportunity to contribute to this valuable work and extend our best wishes and stand ready to provide any additional information to your good offices.

Kind Regards

**ASSEDEL**, L'Association européenne pour la défense des droits et des libertés

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## **GREECE PUSHBACK of ASYLUM-SEEKERS**

### **CASE 1**

**Date:** September 07, 2020

***Location:** Greece-Turkey Border (aka Maritsa River)*

On the unlawful practices in Turkey and the slanders against innocent people, Mrs. N. S. (39), has decided to withdraw from Turkey with two daughters. They land on Greece soil and arrive at a nearby village of 'Marasia' in Greece (Photo-1 Mrs.N.S. and daughters). They wait for a while in front of the village church (Photo-2 and Photo-3 Mrs.N.S. and daughters). First two police officers, then ten soldiers arrive. The police officers are peaceful, but the soldiers search for their clothes and belongings and take their electronic devices. Then they get them on a van and drive them for around 30 minutes. As they arrive somewhere, men in ski-masks with guns and sticks are awaiting. The ski-masked men put the Turks in another armored vehicle with iron bars. Mrs. N.S. and her daughters think they have been taken to a police station. However, they get out of the vehicle and realize that they are back at the banks of Maritsa River. The men put 15 asylum seekers on a small boat. One of the rowers of the boat speaks Turkish and the other speaks Greek, and both are wearing ski-masks. Mrs. N.S. and her daughters return to the Turkey side. As the boat reaches Turkey's side, the Turkish border patrol notices them capture. They put them in a vehicle and take them to a police station in the city of Edirne. Mrs. N.S. fled the lawless practices in Turkey to protect herself and her two daughters. However, the Greek officials acted unlawfully and expelled them illegally. These incidents were written by H.R.S. (15), Mrs. N.S.'s daughter (Statement of H.R.S.-1-2). We also provide you the English translation of her statement as an Appendix (English Translation of statement of H.R.S.).

Mrs. N.S. was arrested the same day and sent to prison. We are also providing you these documents that took her to prison (Document 3, Document 4). The language used in the documents for a female schoolteacher and a mother of two daughters is scary. This bizarre contrast is experienced in today's Turkey. We do not know what happened to Mrs. M.S. next. Her husband has already been in prison for three years. Her two teenager-aged daughters were separated from both of their parents at such a critical age. What will be the future of these young people, who have had a successful education life until now? What marks will such a traumatic incident leave in these young people? For the next part of their lives, will they be able to mend this pain? Will they be able to go back to happy days with their parents? We cannot answer these questions and it is difficult to keep positive thinking for their future. Alternatively, they could start a free life in Greece these days, and after a recovery period, they could move on to another country in Europe and continue their education and career.

## **GREECE PUSHBACK of ASYLUM-SEEKERS**

### **CASE 2**

**Date:** September 10, 2020

***Location:*** Greece-Turkey Border (aka Maritsa River)

Another pushback incident has happened in September 2020. As asylum seekers on Greek soil, the teacher couple Mrs. A.Ş. and Mr. M.Ş. have been experienced ill-treatment, robbery, and illegal push-back from Greek officials. They were soon caught by Turkish border patrol, arrested, and imprisoned without a fair trial. Considering the potential reservations of the family, we also cover their names and detailed credentials in the attached documents. These documents have reached us through some lawyers who follow up on push-back incidents. The statements of the victims emphasize that the pushbacks are operated by non-Greek persons wearing ski-masks at the witness of the Greek police officers. The attached documents (Statement of Mrs. A.Ş., Translation of the Statement of Mr. M.Ş., Statement of Mr. M.Ş., Translation of the Statement of Mr. M.Ş.) explain their case in detail. We also have the related police reports and documentation of officials for their arrests at the police.