



**REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS  
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR  
MINISTER'S OFFICE**

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**Dimitris Avramopoulos**  
EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship  
B-1049 Brussels

**Ministers of Home Affairs EU 28+**

Dear Commissioner,

Dear colleagues

The migratory crisis of 2015 has clearly demonstrated the gaps in our European migration and asylum policy, but most importantly the need for a substantial reform of the Common European Asylum System.

The inability to reach an agreement based on the equal application of the principles of solidarity and responsibility, has undoubtedly caused a serious breach in our trusting relations, and has even led to the compromise of the Schengen area, as one of the greatest achievements of the European Union.

While we have managed to agree on a limited set of measures, in order to effectively reduce the migratory influx and manage the disproportionate pressures faced by front-line Member States, the approach has only partially addressed the migratory routes.

Due to this reason, and while the overall numbers of arrivals continue to demonstrate decreasing tendencies, the arrivals in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean route continue to steadily increase, despite the measures taken on a national level.

In the absence of a truly holistic agreement that will enable the appropriate management of migratory influx to the EU, the Republic of Cyprus is in urgent need of immediate assistance, given the unprecedented high number of arrivals.

Following up on our recent discussions in Helsinki and Paris with a view to establishing a temporary solidarity mechanism, and in the context of my interventions about the need to also include mass arrivals in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean I hereby urge you all to assist Cyprus through provisional relocation measures in order to relieve and alleviate the disproportionate burden put upon the asylum and reception system of my country.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, Cyprus is characterized by important peculiarities which greatly affect the situation at hand.

For one, our geographical proximity to the socioeconomically and politically unstable area has often made Cyprus a country hosting great numbers of asylum seekers. What is more, due to the situation in the area, many of the persons arriving are prima facie refugees or persons in need of protection.

At the same time, and despite our continuous efforts, Turkey systematically refuses to cooperate with the competent authorities of the Republic. Furthermore, and while the greatest percentage of the arrivals come to Cyprus through Turkey or via the occupied area, the Turkish occupation of 37% of our territory, makes it impossible to implement any measures targeted to reducing the migratory influx towards the Republic.

What is more, with a population of barely 850.000 people, Cyprus remains the top receiving Member State regarding first time asylum applications in proportion to its population for the third consecutive year, despite our systematic efforts.

While we certainly support the notion of an approach that incorporates all migratory routes, it is evident that Cyprus differentiates to a large extent, due to the peculiarities described above. For those reasons, it is very likely that the systematic increase of arrivals will continue or even reach a further peak, as it has been the case for the past three years.

Next to the acute need of preventing a new wave of migratory mass influx, by means of securing the EU external border, Cyprus has done its utmost to effectively address the migratory inflow of persons. Despite a series of measures that have been taken with a view to strengthen our asylum system and its capacities, the disproportionate pressures of the past three consecutive years have reached a peak of 130% increase in the first six months of 2019.

Allow me to repeat my deepest appreciation for the readiness of the European Commission and the agencies, in particular EASO, to assist us in our efforts.

Nonetheless, and despite the measures taken, Cyprus is currently hosting around 9.000 persons to whom protection has been granted only in the past few years. Syrian nationals, as prima facie persons in need of protection, account for over 26% of the overall migratory influx of Cyprus from 2016 onwards.

According to the available data, around 8.500 persons arrived to Cyprus from Turkey or through the occupied areas between 2015-2019. The number of persons arriving to Cyprus and applying for asylum between January and June 2019 is nearly 7.000, while the backlog of applications awaiting examination has increased to almost 15.000, despite the additional staff hired by the Asylum Service.

Unfortunately, despite our efforts to effectively manage the mass influx but also our repeated pleas for solidarity measures, Cyprus has not benefited from any relocation scheme so far.

As one of the guardians of the Union's external borders, we remain committed towards our obligations deriving from international and European acquis. Nonetheless, I have to admit that our capabilities and resources are beyond the point of exhaustion and we are at risk of not being able to help those who are really in need of protection.

In line with article 80 TFEU, I hereby urge all Member States to submit their pledges for relocating 5.000 persons from Cyprus, on the basis of bilateral agreements, and with priority given to vulnerable persons, in order to significantly alleviate the disproportionate pressures and severe challenges faced, both by the Authorities, but also the social structures of the country. Financial support for the implementation of the scheme should become available in line with existing instruments.

Only a Europe that stands in solidarity with all its members, especially those in grave need of assistance, can promote its values and protect the principles that founded the European family.

Yours sincerely,



Constantinos Petrides  
Minister of Interior