UNHCR, CC BY-NC 2.0

en

Study | 06.06.2018

The EU-Turkey Statement and the Greek Hotspots

A failed European pilot project in refugee policy

The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament has criticised the EU-Turkey statement since its adoption in March 2016. Our main concerns include the violation of international and European law by delegating the responsibility to ensure access to international protection for refugees to a third country and the circumvention of democratic oversight and public scrutiny
through the adoption of informal deals instead of official agreements on which the European Parliament shall be consulted.

The implementation of the EU-Turkey statement is closely interconnected with the implementation of the so-called “hotspot approach” in Greece. At the end of 2015, new hotspots were established as registration and reception centres for more effective asylum procedures. Subsequent to the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, Greek hotspots have now become places of de facto detention, where fast-track asylum and return procedures are being carried out with the aim of achieving an expedited return of asylum seekers to Turkey.

The present study focuses on the detrimental impact that the EU-Turkey statement and the implementation of the hotspot approach is having on the rights of refugees and migrants arriving in Greece. The findings of the study demonstrate that the current procedures and practices for processing asylum applications on the Greek islands under the EU-Turkey statement violate the
applicants’ right to asylum and due process. We find particularly worrying that the EU-Turkey statement and the procedures on the Greek islands, based on the generalised assumption that a third country could be considered “safe” for asylum applicants, may serve as a model for similar informal arrangements with other third countries.

The EU-Turkey statement was adopted in the total absence of democratic oversight. It was agreed upon by EU leaders without the involvement of the European Parliament. As the statement is not formally legally binding and cannot be defined as an official EU agreement, the General Court of the European Union excluded its competence to intervene concerning the legality of the statement. Making use of informal agreements to define cooperation on issues that bear a very high human cost, such as migration and asylum, creates a vacuum of accountability and undermines the rule of law.

The European Commission and the European Council consider the EU-Turkey statement a success and

refer to a significant decline in the number of arrivals on the Greek islands. It is claimed that return procedures under the statement have kept refugees from risking the perilous passage across the Mediterranean. However, the lower number of spontaneous arrivals in Greece has to be analysed in conjunction with the increased in-country apprehensions of undocumented migrants, the patrolling of the Aegean
coast and land borders carried out by the Turkish authorities, the continued arrivals occurring along the Central Mediterranean route, and with the renewed arrivals at the Southern borders in Ceuta and Melilla. As EU Member States keep refusing
to urgently establish safe channels for regular and orderly migration, irregular travel will remain the only option available. This keeps causing suffering, despair and exposure to violence for those wishing to flee armed conflicts and repression.

Drawing on the analysis of 40 case studies of Syrian asylum seekers lodged and examined in the hotspots on the Greek islands, this report assesses the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement. It provides a detailed analysis of the various procedures carried out at the five hotspots on the Greek islands of Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Kos and Leros. The study shows how the hotspots
approach, coupled with the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, violates the rights of refugees and migrants and still fails to achieve its underlying dual aim, namely to contain migrants and refugees in order to deter potential new arrivals and to facilitate returns from Greece to Turkey.

Based on the results of the present study we developed a series of recommendations.

- **DOWNLOAD THE STUDY**

Recommended

Event

© girma-nigusse



FRONTEX – WHICH WAY?

02.07.2026

Study

©abraham osorio



REFORMING FRONTEX | A HUMAN RIGHTS - BASED REVIEW

01.07.2026

Press release

Nikolaus Riss



MEPs denied proper inspection of detention center in G…

29.06.2026

Press release

MarcosMaltese



[Right-wing majority jettisons compassion & common sens…]

17.06.2026

Responsible MEPs



Eva Joly

Member



Ska Keller

Member



Jean Lambert

Member



Barbara Lochbihler

Member



Michel Reimon

Member



Judith Sargentini

Member



Bodil Valero

Vice-President

Attached documents

THE EU-TURKEY STATEMENT AND THE GREEK HOTSPOTS

Please share

- E-Mail