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Subject: Mission of Deputy Director-General Beate Gminder, Head of Task Force, to Athens, Lesbos, Chios and Samos on 22-31 March 2021

Main meetings of the mission:

- Minister of Migration and Asylum, [REDACTED]
- Deputy Minister for Integration and UAMs [REDACTED]
- Secretary General for Asylum Policy, [REDACTED]
- Secretary General for Reception, [REDACTED]
- Special Secretary for UAMs, [REDACTED]
- Director General of the Managing Authority [REDACTED]
- Secretary General for Public Investments and NSRF, [REDACTED]
- Secretary General of Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, [REDACTED]
- Governor of Northern Aegean, [REDACTED]
- Mayor of Mytilene, [REDACTED]
- Mayor of West Lesbos, [REDACTED]
- Mayor of Chios, [REDACTED]
- Mayor of Samos, [REDACTED]
- IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF and NGOs on the islands

New multi-purpose reception and identification centres

On 22 March, a videoconference between Minister [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] took place together with the respective services to discuss the **draft designs of the new Lesbos multi-purpose reception and identification centre** in view of the grant application process. Main conclusions:

- The need for adherence to the EASO standards is broadly shared by all parties, acknowledging the pilot project nature of the new centre.
- The revised designs and clarifications by the Technical Department ahead of the meeting made substantial improvements in taking account of EASO standards.
- There are some elements that require further discussion, *inter alia* clarity on room surfaces (4m² minimum room space per adult), access to different services including education, degree and type of security (fencing and/or alternative security measures). EASO, Greek authorities and Task Force will hold a further technical consultation to come to an agreed draft design.

On 23 March, the Task Force and EASO accompanied the Minister on his monthly visit to supervise the **construction of the new multi-purpose reception and identification centre** in Samos. Substantial progress has been made and construction is on track. The IOM-built first section has been handed over to the Greek authorities.

In the construction area, the first accommodation container has been installed. This shows a marked improvement from the current facilities, hosting living spaces with separate electrical circuit and fire detectors, and communal up-to-standard toilets and showers blocks centrally in each container section.

Visit to existing reception and identification centres

The Task Force visit to Vial reception centre **in Chios** with the RIC commander and local representatives of the nearby Chalkios commune confirmed an improved situation, with e.g. the unaccompanied minors (UAM) safe zone newly repaired since few months with Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) funds, significant reduction in the informal settlement and improved health conditions through cooperation with the local community and with an NGO active also on Lesvos, Movement on the Ground, to clean the surroundings. A quarantine area has also been fitted in a former school by UNCHR, paid by AMIF.

The visit to the existing **Samos** Vathy reception centre showed clear decongestion efforts, but significant overcrowding still remains. The transfer of residents to the new reception centre is announced for May. The Ministry intends to associate Eurorelief, NGO also active on Lesvos, to help with the transfer.

The visit to the temporary facility Mavrovouni on **Lesvos** showed progress in the improvement works in the “blue zone”. Partners on the ground informed contract for internal water and sewage networks has been signed, with those works expected to start as of 5 April.

Meetings with local communities

Several meetings took place with the local authorities throughout the mission.

In separate meetings on 23 and 25 March, both the mayor of Samos, [REDACTED] and the mayor of Chios, [REDACTED] underlined the need for a comprehensive approach and requested the EU to help fight populism. It was perceived that in past years, their islands have suffered at Europe’s border facing uncontrolled migration. This led to overcrowded reception structures that do not offer humane conditions to migrants, and are a burden to local communities alike. Decongestion should continue, flows should be managed and it is important that fast procedures and a new centre can ensure controlled migration management and more humane conditions, where people do not remain trapped on the island. Economic support is important to ensure local communities can revive.

On 26 March, the Task Force, together with the Secretary-General of Reception, [REDACTED], visited **the island of Lesvos** and met with [REDACTED] Governor of the North Aegean, [REDACTED] Mayor of Mytilini municipality – hosting the Mavrovouni temporary facility and the chosen Plati site for the new centre, and [REDACTED] Mayor of West Lesvos.

[REDACTED] indicated continued resistance against a new reception centre on Lesvos, and flagged his concern over the amount spent on the new multi-purpose reception and identification centres, the European Commission should instead focus expenditure on economic development of the region. [REDACTED] expressed similar concern on the amounts, and underlined the need for a balanced approach with tangible economic support for the North

Aegean, a more controlled migration management and no major structures hosting migrants on the islands. He pointed to the continued volatile atmosphere among locals on Lesbos.

█ requested the government to proceed as soon as possible with the construction of the new centre, to ensure a more controlled management of migration. He further enquired on the support for economic development through the Structural Funds.

Beyond these concerns, all local authorities flagged their reservations regarding the new Pact on Migration and Asylum. It is perceived that the current proposals on the border procedure introduce “grey zones” on the islands, undermining the Greek territorial integrity. Strong mandatory solidarity must be ensured so that the islands must no longer bear sole responsibility for migration management.

Meetings with Greek national Ministries and International Organisations

A series of meetings was held with different Greek Ministries and with International Organisations to discuss the strategic orientation of the Greek reception system and integration programmes and the linked financial planning under the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework. Main conclusions:

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- The Ministry will set up a workshop with Unicef, the Special Secretary for unaccompanied minors and relevant other services to discuss proposals for a new education project under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund to ensure coherent preparation of children towards formal education across Greece;
- The Ministry will organise a dedicated workshop with IOM, EASO and relevant services on the strategic outlook for site management, including considerations on waste management and transport to schools;
- The need to ensure a comprehensive integration strategy for beneficiaries of international protection with clear objectives and result indicators. Adequate coordination between the Ministries of Migration and Asylum, Labour and Social Inclusion is necessary to arrive to concrete proposals and projects to be integrated under the European Structural Funds.
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The Head of TF accompanied as well Commissioner Johansson during her two-day visit in Athens and on Samos and Lesbos and chaired the Steering Committee for Migration Management. At the end a debriefing of the mission was given to the EU embassies in Athens and the TF MS group.