



BRUSSELS (18 February 2015) – The Regional Office for Europe of the United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR) welcomes the plan of the new Government of Greece for a comprehensive change of migration policy, as announced by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras on 8 February 2015.

OHCHR expressed appreciation for a policy statement made on 5 February 2015 by the newly appointed Deputy Minister for Migration, Tasia Christodouloupoulou, who reaffirmed the government's intention to respect the rule of law, human rights and international conventions. She declared that the Xenios Zeus police operations would be discontinued and that detention centers – starting with Amygdaleza - would be closed or converted into open shelters. “These are very welcome signs, as is the new Government’s announced intention to grant citizenship to children born or raised in Greece,” said Jan Jařab, OHCHR’s Regional Representative for Europe.

Greece’s challenges in the area of human rights of migrants have long been a major concern. They include pushbacks at sea, repressive police operations (Xenios Zeus), routine and lengthy placement into detention facilities as well as the substandard conditions in these facilities. “The

Xenios Zeus operation has reportedly led to abusive stops and searches of large numbers of persons presumed to be irregular migrants," said Mr. Jařab. "Moreover, a large number of migrants apprehended in the context of this operation have been placed in detention. This has contributed to overcrowding and often deplorable conditions in which migrants and asylum seekers have been held in detention centers such as that in Amygdaleza, which has recently been the stage of a lengthy protest and, later, a suicide of one of the migrants."

Moreover, the Regional Representative encouraged the Government to address other well-known human rights challenges concerning migrants. He pointed in particular to the failure of the authorities to properly investigate the role of coast guards in the tragedy at Farmakonisi (27 January 2014) where several women and children died. The sentencing of a young Syrian to 145 years in prison – while the coast guards enjoyed full impunity – is seen by the human rights community as incomprehensible. It is also difficult to understand why in the case of the April 2013 shooting of migrant strawberry pickers at Manolada the employers were not prosecuted in line with the EU's Employers Sanctions Directive. The Regional Representative also mentioned the widely criticized health regulation which lays down mandatory HIV testing for irregular migrants and other categories of persons.

OHCHR stands ready to provide advice and guidance to the Government to address the issues of rights of migrants and of other vulnerable groups, particularly those adversely affected by austerity policies, including persons with disabilities, children in alternative care, older persons and Roma.

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The Regional Office for Europe in Brussels represents the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Europe. The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal human rights official of the United Nations and heads the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which spearheads the United Nations' human rights efforts.

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