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PE6601 Translation

EN Mr Aguilar,

United in diversity

EN

Many thanks for your letter.

As you are well aware, Greece and the other EU Member States have been called upon over the last few months to deal with an unprecedented public health challenge, seeking to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The need to prioritise the safety of Greek and other European citizens has to be dovetailed with the equally important migrant/refugee management issue at a time when neighbouring Turkey seems determined to capitalise on the suffering of thousands of such people who arrived at Adrianopolis/Edirne at the end of February, seeking access to Greece and thence to central and northern Europe.

In the teeth of major difficulties, Greek police officers are continuing to safeguard and uphold the constitutional rights of citizens, as well as complying with their statutory Union and international border patrol obligations, without prejudice to the fundamental rights of those arriving at EU external borders.

To this end, Greek police commanders have issued instructions to all officers regarding protection of the fundamental human rights of migrants and refugees, while the police code of conduct manual specifically requires them, as a general principle, to treat members of the public in a fair and impartial manner.

Officers also receive basic and advanced specialist training familiarising them with human rights framework provisions, situations triggering racist violence and the correct approach to, and management of, vulnerable groups such as migrants and refugees.

With particular reference to the allegations contained in your letter, that is to say the use of live fire on human targets, acts of violence, refoulement of migrants towards Turkey and similar accusations by the press, international organisations and NGOs, we are once again obliged to stress that such accusations are groundless and that the actions described form no part of Greek law enforcement procedures or operational practice. The accusations are of a general nature and require closer scrutiny and verification by the competent national authorities. Moreover, it is not made clear whence the so-called evidence was obtained and how it was passed on, making it harder to verify the above allegations.

Greece complies fully with the Union acquis regarding border management, returns and asylum. All third-country nationals and stateless persons illegally entering the country without completing the necessary formalities are taken to hotspots for completion of reception and identification formalities.

On completion of these formalities, those third country nationals and stateless persons who do not meet the criteria for international or other protection (vulnerable categories) are, by decision of the hotspot administrator, handed over to the police for expulsion, return or readmission in line with the relevant provisions.