

The President

Mr Jorge BUXADÉ VILLALBA, MEP
WIERTZ 03U005
BRUSSELS

e-mail: jorge.buxadevillalba@europarl.europa.eu

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Dear Mr Buxadé Villalba, dear colleagues,

Thank you for your message to the Presidents of the Council and the Commission as well as myself of 4 March 2020 on the situation at the Greek and Bulgarian border.

The situation at the external border of the Union in Greece is, indeed, very concerning, notably with the Corona Virus crisis unfolding on top of the continuously precarious situation on the Greek islands. In the first place, this reminds us of our commitment to upholding our European values and principles and calls for urgent action to provide in particular the most vulnerable persons with the necessary support in line with European law. With regard to the overcrowded camps on the islands, this means in the first place relocating people from the islands to prevent the disease from spreading.

As you know, I visited, along with the Presidents of the Commission and the Council, the Greek-Turkish border on 3 March to receive first-hand information on the situation on the ground. Following this visit, Parliament, Council and Commission agreed to provide additional support to Greece in the form of financial as well as operational support among which additional personnel and equipment provided by Frontex.

Moreover, several meetings took place between EU institutions and the Turkish President R. T. Erdogan to return to the application of the measures listed in the Statement of the Union and Turkey of 2016. These measures include reception and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to Member States of the European Union, as well as the obligation for Turkey to take back Syrian refugees from the Greek islands that were already safely hosted in Turkey. The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey has now been fully committed and more than half of the money has been disbursed. Different European leaders have acknowledged the role of Turkey in the reception of refugees from the war-torn region and ensured their continued willingness to support Turkey in this endeavour. However, the European Union also insists on the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement.

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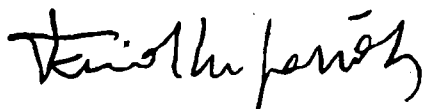
However, the readiness of Turkey to be a host for millions of refugees cannot imply that the European Union can skip its international and regional responsibilities. On the basis of international and European law, all Member States have agreed to respect the Geneva Convention and to take measures to give effect to it. The European Parliament, as co-legislator, is committed to the full implementation of the existing legislation in the framework of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) based on Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union that remains applicable also for Greece and Bulgaria.

With regard to mid-term solutions, the Parliament has adopted mandates for negotiations with the Council on a reform of the CEAS with a view to avoid emergency situations as those we are experiencing right now in Greece. Unfortunately, the Member States have not been able so far to find common ground on the essential legislative proposals for the reform, namely the Dublin Regulation and the Asylum Procedure Regulation. The Parliament's mandate, adopted by a two-third majority in plenary in 2017, foresees a mechanism for the relocation of asylum seekers that would help to avoid overcrowded reception facilities on the Greek islands as well as uncontrollable numbers of arrivals of irregular migrants, problematic for Greece and Bulgaria. I have called on the Council to come to a decision on this matter, so that the Union can finally define a truly European asylum policy.

The Parliament has advocated for and taken decisions that ensure a balance between the rights of applicants and fair and effective procedures to identify those in need of international protection and to return those not entitled to stay in the Union in a dignified way. In line with Parliament's position of the last years, I have recently called for urgent measures to improve the situation of unaccompanied minors, to treat them in the first place as children, and to provide them with the protection that is in line with our laws and principles. The readiness of a few Member States to relocate 1.600 unaccompanied and particularly vulnerable minors from the islands can only be a first step into the right direction.

Unfortunately, the Corona Virus crisis is slowing down the decision-making on and the implementation of the measures needed to improve the situation at the external border in Greece. However, I will continue to work with Members' support for the respect of fundamental rights, support for the most vulnerable, uphold a partnership with Turkey that respects international law and human rights, provide the necessary emergency support for Greece, and push for a sustainable reform of the CEAS for a sustainable solution.

Yours sincerely,



David Maria SASSOLI

cc:

Mr Herman TERTSCH, Ms Margarita DE LA PISA, Ms Mazaly AGUILAR,
Mr Charlie WEIMERS, Mr Peter LUNDGREN, Ms Jessica STEGRUD,
Mr Derk Jan EPPINK, Mr Carlo FIDANZA, Mr Nicola PROCACCINI,
Ms Ruža TOMAŠIĆ, Mr Roberts ZILE, Mr Emmanouil FRAGKOS