



UNHCR Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
73rd Plenary Session

Geneva, October 10 – 14, 2022

Agenda item 3: General Debate

Statement by H.E. the Minister of Migration and Asylum of the Hellenic Republic
Mr. Panagiotis MITARACHI

Thank you Chair,
High Commissioner,

Greece fully aligns with the EU statement and we will make some remarks in our national capacity.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

We need to do more; to resolve global inequalities, as well as lack of democracy and respect for human rights, in many parts of the world. Europe can do more to relocate people in need, and Greece will participate in such efforts. We have done so this year in the case of Ukraine, we have done so last year in the case of Afghanistan, providing almost 1,000 humanitarian visas to female dignitaries and their families.

We need to do more; to provide opportunities for people to prosper, and everyone is entitled to want a better future. Providing more visas to people to come and work in Europe, but with rules. Having said that, the Geneva Convention was not an encompassing tool to resolve all global injustices. We see today smugglers taking advantage of people. Making fortunes transferring migrants, undertaking extreme risk, as we see fatalities, especially at sea. Transferring migrants between countries, safe countries, signatories of the Geneva Convention, countries Members of the Council of Europe. It is critical to preserve the integrity of the Asylum System. Providing asylum to those in need, but actively discouraging asylum shopping. We need to provide shelter to those entitled to international protection in a coordinated way.

As the EU did in the case of Ukraine, activating the temporary protection mechanism and granting the right of free movement within the European Union. Greece has already welcomed 75,000 people from Ukraine. Some may argue that the European Asylum model is broken. Most arrivals today do not originate directly from countries at risk. Smuggling networks today, get to decide who

enters Europe. Resorting to asylum backlogs, lack of reception capacity affecting many countries.

Free movement of recognized refugees within Europe is still restricted. Returns of those not entitled to international protection are difficult, and that affects public opinion on migration.

This model has to be broken by providing legal pathways. Explore screening mechanisms before arrival to Europe and providing, within the EU, a mandatory relocation mechanism to all countries; so as to avoid the first reception countries facing uneven, unfair pressure. And Greece is committed to protecting its border in line with international law, especially in cases of instrumentalisation of migration, when human suffering yields to geopolitical strategies. It is prescient to the face of migrant smuggling, when human suffering yields to financial gain. We need to get the EU - Turkey 2016 Joint Statement back on track. And we welcome UNCHR efforts to increase prevention of unlawful departures, stepping up efforts to combat smuggling networks and working efficiently with governments.

Dear Delegates,

Greece over the last eight years has welcomed over 1 million refugees. This year we anticipate 35,000 asylum applications. Since 2019, we have drastically improved our asylum reception facilities and the protection of unaccompanied minors. We now host 18,000 asylum seekers in new Reception Centres fully compliant with very strict EU standards. We have reduced our asylum backlog sevenfold from 200 thousand, to 30 thousand today. We have placed particular emphasis on the protection of unaccompanied minors. This is a strategic priority for us and we have worked successfully, with our EU partners on relocations. We invest actively on integration programs, offering full access to health, education and employment to all recognised refugees. We are doing our part.

But as migration constitutes a key challenge during these turbulent times, we need to devise collective efficient management systems, share best practices, create a common European protection space, but most importantly stand together on the issue, in line with our common values.

Thank you.