

Rome, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018

At the closest point, the coasts of Turkey and Greece are only a couple of nautical miles apart. Notwithstanding the significant risks to life and the sums charged by the people-smugglers facilitating crossings, in the past three years, over 1M people have opted take this route into the EU in the hope of finding a better life.



It is fair to say that Greece has felt overwhelmed by the numbers arriving since 2015. However, in March 2016, the EU and Turkey made an arrangement with one another. The arrangement was recorded in the form of a “statement” rather than a regulation or directive and, as such, bypassed the scrutiny of the EU Parliament.

The joint EU-Turkey Statement (“EUTS”) provided a mechanism for returning every single migrant crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands directly to Turkey, except where it was assessed that (1) the person in question was “vulnerable” and (2) Turkey was a “safe third country” to which that person could be returned. In return for its co-operation, Turkey would receive six billion Euros. In addition, for every person returned to Turkey, a Syrian could be sent by Turkey to the EU to be resettled.

Whilst there is no question that the number of arrivals has decreased dramatically since 2015, the effect of the policy has not been the steady return of migrants from Greece to Turkey. In the two years following publication of the EUTS<sup>1</sup> 2,164 migrants have been forcibly returned to Turkey and a further 2,401 voluntarily returned. In the same period 57,450 arrived, of which 21,847 were relocated from the island hotspots.

The principal effect of the policy has in fact been to cause tens of thousands of migrants to become blocked on the Greek island hotspots. As the policy applies only to those on the islands, new arrivals are no longer being routinely dispersed to mainland Greece. Instead, already overcrowded refugee camps at the hotspots are under increasing pressure from new arrivals. At the Vial camp on Chios, which I visited at the end of October, estimates are that twice the anticipated number of people currently occupy the maze of metal containers and tents, with one toilet for every 50 people.

<sup>1</sup> EU Turkey Statement Two Years On [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20180314\\_eu-turkey-two-years-on\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20180314_eu-turkey-two-years-on_en.pdf)

There is significant concern that the vulnerability assessments being made are cursory, and are being carried out by people with little training or experience. It is well-documented that interpretation is inadequate, both in terms of the numbers of interpreters available, and the range of languages spoken. It is equally well-documented that there is insufficient legal advice available regarding the asylum process, particularly at appeal stage. The result: a legal system which cannot process the claims being made and camps which cannot support the numbers arriving, to say nothing of the physical and psychological effect on those trapped within the system...and the resentment of islanders whose economies are reliant on tourism but find tourists staying away in increasing numbers.



In the drive to limit the numbers coming into the EU, we appear to have lost focus on the very values upon which the EU was founded, including that of human dignity. It might be worth spending a moment in the shoes of someone living at Vial before we consider whether the sacrifice is worth it.