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The situation at the Northern Aegean islands is critical

After visiting the detention center of “VIAL” in Chalkeion, Chios, on the 30th and 31st March 2016, following phone calls received from persons in need of international protection in this detention center, the Greek Council for Refugees demands the intervention of the responsible authorities, and highlights the following:

1. In this detention center about 1.500 persons were detained under exceptionally bad conditions during the time of our visit, while the relevant authorities informed us that the centre's capacity is for 1.100 persons. Detainees included prima facie refugees, mainly from Syria.
2. Detention orders had not been given to any of the detainees, while information on the reasons for the deprivation of their freedom, as well as on their rights and obligations in Greece was not provided either.
3. A considerable number of people, amongst them also persons whose family members are in other EU Member States and wish to re-unite with them, have mentioned the inefficiency of the Authorities to write down their will to submit an asylum application. It is mentioned that the responsible team of the Asylum Service, functioning within the building, consists only of three case workers and one operator who also acts as a coordinator. Consequently, it is humanly impossible to respond to the existing needs, in order to safeguard the direct and unhindered access to the asylum process for all who wish to submit an asylum application.

In light of the above, it is particularly alarming that the return of newly arrived persons to Turkey, who have not submitted an asylum application in Greece, is about to be put into force, as we are informed by Press releases that have not yet been refuted by State authorities.

Given the aforementioned facts, and as per the ascertainment of the Press Officer of the European Commission announcing the implementation of the 19th March 2016 Agreement between EU-Turkey with regards to the returns of refugees from Greece to Turkey, launched on Monday, 4th April 2016,

the Greek Council for Refugees,

1. Expresses its particular concern regarding the lack of information and substantial possibility of access to the asylum process in Greece for the newly-arriving refugees and,
2. Underlines that the potential return of persons to Turkey without the previous granting of a real and substantial possibility to access the asylum process and consecutively without the examination of their application within the framework of a fair and efficient procedure, is a grave violation of national, European and international law.



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