

9 November 2001

Further information on UA 282/01 (EUR 25/008/2001, 6 November 2001) - Fear of forcible return**GREECE**Bedia Ergün (f)]

Özgür Kiliç (m)] Turkish citizens

Cem Arikan (m)]

711 others, mainly Kurds from Turkey and Iraq

The Greek authorities announced on 7 November that they would allow the 714 people aboard the Turkish-flagged ship now in Zakynthos port to apply for asylum. By 8 November all those on board had been allowed to come ashore, and given shelter in a hotel and a gymnasium. Those who need it have been offered medical treatment.

The authorities had indicated at first that they would not allow any of those on board to apply for asylum, and would forcibly return them to Turkey.

Bedia Ergün, Özgür Kiliç and Cem Arikan have reportedly been allowed to see a lawyer. It is now known that, like the other two, Cem Arikan was released from prison on health grounds after taking part in a death fast in protest against a new prison regime for political prisoners in Turkey.

The captain of the ship and six crew members, all Turkish, were thought to have abandoned the ship but were discovered to be still on board. On 8 November they were each sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and a heavy fine for human trafficking.

The Greek and Turkish governments signed an agreement on 8 November allowing them to return illegal immigrants to each other's countries within 14 days of arrival. The agreement covers immigrants setting out from third countries, but reportedly does not apply to political refugees. It also provides for both countries to exchange information on human trafficking networks.

The agreement is reciprocal, though nearly all of the current flow of refugees is towards Greece via Turkey, from countries further east.

Many thanks to all who took action on this case. If possible, please send a final round of appeals, in English, French, German, Italian or your own language:

- welcoming the government statement of 7 November that Greece will allow those on board the ship that was towed into Zakynthos on 5 November to apply for asylum, and the care and protection given to them on Zakynthos;
- welcoming reports that the three Turkish citizens, Bedia Ergün, Özgür Kiliç and Cem Arikan have had access to a lawyer;
- expressing concern at reports that the Greek police frequently expel refugees on arrival, without allowing them to apply for asylum, and noting reports that on 25 September 2001 a court on Samos ordered 189 people, mostly Afghans and Iraqis, to be expelled for illegal entry, after a trial where they were reportedly not defended by a lawyer and where some of the defendants had no interpreter;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Greece consistently and systematically gives all potential asylum-seekers the opportunity to apply for asylum and the right to have their asylum claim assessed in a fair procedure, as well as access to the UNHCR, non-governmental organizations, legal counsel and, where appropriate, interpreters;

- expressing concern at reports of overcrowding and harsh conditions in some of the centres where asylum seekers and illegal migrants are detained, which may amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and urging the authorities to ensure that appropriate measures are taken urgently to improve conditions at these centres.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

Mr Kostas Simitis
Office of the Prime Minister
Megaron Maximou
19 Herodou Atticou Avenue
106 74 Athens
Greece

Fax: + 30 1 671 5799

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Public Order

Mr Mihalis Chrysochoidis
Ministry of Public Order
1 Katehaki Street
101 77 Athens
Greece

Fax: + 30 1 691 79 44

Salutation: Dear Minister

Copies to diplomatic representatives of Greece accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 December 2001.