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Dear Mr Shehada,

Thank you for your letter dated 4 March 2020 to which President von der Leyen asked me to respond to you directly.

I would like to reiterate the statements I made on 10 March 2020 before the European Parliament's plenary meeting, as they answer many of the issues raised in your letter.

The Commission and the Council have expressed their support to Greece in the current situation, but while Greece has to secure the EU's borders, it has to do so with proportionate measures. There is in my view no contradiction between protecting the EU borders and upholding fundamental rights, even in difficult times. The right to access the asylum procedure is enshrined in the EU Treaty and in international law, and needs to be complied with by Greece.

With regard to the reference to Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union made by the Greek authorities in their announcements of 1 March 2020, I agree with you that it is for the Commission to make a proposal to the Council for the adoption of provisional measures. No such proposal has been made by the Commission.

Mr. Muhammad Shehada
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The Commission has indeed assured Greece of further financial support in its Action Plan presented on 4 March 2020. The Action Plan includes: (i) the launch of two rapid border intervention operations by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) at the land and sea borders between Greece and Turkey; (ii) the setting up of a Frontex coordinated programme for the quick return of persons without the right to stay; (iii) a Financial assistance of EUR 700 million, which consists of EUR 350 million immediately available and an additional EUR 350 million (if approved by the budgetary authorities); (iv) the activation of the Civil Protection Mechanism to provide medical equipment, shelters, tents, blankets, and other necessary supplies; (v) the rapid deployment by the European Asylum Support Office of additional experts to Greece.

This financial assistance would complement the EUR 2.4 billion which has already been provided to Greece since 2015, with the aim to support increased the reception capacity in the islands, the provision of services in mainland camps, the Greek asylum system, and the enhancement of returns.

It is important to recall that financial support, including emergency assistance, is only provided by the EU for projects that comply with the EU acquis. This has been reiterated to the Greek authorities by my services.

The European Union remains committed to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, and acknowledges that Turkey itself is under a huge migratory pressure and needs support. Discussions with President Erdoğan have focused on mapping areas that work in both the EU's and Turkey's interest and areas that are lacking in order to come to a common understanding of what is needed to implement the missing pieces. This is why the European Union continues to deliver on the Statement and will continue doing so.

I would like to underline that both President von der Leyen and myself have personally called on Member States to relocate persons from Greece, in particular unaccompanied minors, and are currently working on a voluntary relocation exercise with the Greek authorities and interested Member States. At present, 8 Member States have committed to participate in the relocation of up to 1600 unaccompanied minors from Greece. In addition to this, the Commission is supporting the organisation of a conference on children in migration with Member States in spring.

Finally, in view of the difficult situation brought by the corona crisis throughout Europe, the Commission is in very close contact with the Greek authorities in order to identify any further specific support that may be needed.

I hope this addresses the concerns outlined in your letter.

Yours sincerely,



Ylva JOHANSSON