



## **Cruel conditions in Greece:**

**We demand for human rights and freedom of movement instead of camps and isolation!**

It is absurd that we are demonstrating here today, and that we have to be on the streets to demand the reception of people from the horror of the Aegean islands in Germany. The reception in municipalities that declared more than a year ago that they had space and that they would like to receive more refugees. It is absurd that we demonstrate against the daily struggle for survival of children and young people in the Aegean islands, in mainland Greece and in other hotspots in and around Europe. It is absurd that we demonstrate for them not having to continue to live in sorrows that human beings, especially children, should never have. For instance, the concern about whether they will survive the next night, in a tent, sometimes in freezing temperatures.

Every day, they experience violence while they were actually looking for a safe life. The teams of Doctors Without Borders are alarmed by the high number of suicides attempts and self-inflicted injuries, even of children from only more than two years old. We are furious that we are standing here today and are demonstrating for something that should be taken for granted. The willingness is there, municipalities want to show solidarity, and yet the decision makers block any initiative. The people who hold out at the borders in and around Europe, who are prevented from moving forward and whose rights are disregarded, thus become the chess piece of political powers.

**The life-threatening conditions in Greece have been claiming lives for years, but in recent weeks the situation has escalated further and further, not only on the islands but throughout the whole country.**

At this point we would like to read from an e-mail in which the conditions in Greece are described with a focus on Thessaloniki:

“[Push-backs](#) are executed in the most brutal and degrading way until shortly before Thessaloniki. In the [container camp “Diavata”](#), run by the German Workers’ Samaritan Foundation (ASB), people are digging holes under the containers desperately trying to have at least a little warmth. The [camp “Fylakio”](#) in the east is called “hell camp” by everyone. There, people only get just enough food to survive. There is no medical care, people have to live crammed together in the smallest of spaces, there are reports of rape, and inhabitants are losing their minds. On the road from the eastern border past Kavala to Thessaloniki, there is at least [one accident every week](#), with regular



fatalities, as the police chases cars with refugees along a narrow road. In the north-east, armed vigilante groups are now to be reintroduced, carrying on the tradition of former radical right-wing anti-communist groups. Not to mention criminalisation and mass arrests, or the new obnoxious plans for [“barriers in the water”](#).

**These conditions are intended by the European Union  
and are not isolated cases.**

With high barbed-wire fences, the expansion and militarisation of monitoring and control, and the illegalisation and imprisonment of people on the move, Fortress Europe is strengthened brick by brick. The shameful maxim is: letting die instead of reception, isolation instead of protection. The EU has long-since shifted its deadly borders to third countries. The EU supports authoritarian regimes and invests huge sums in militarisation to not even allow people on the move to come into the view of the Europeans.

The EU has declared war on human smuggling in order to reduce the number of arrivals. Victims of this policy are both people who act in solidarity with refugees, and those seeking protection themselves. Criminal networks making a profit from the situation remain unscathed. At the same time, the EU is not afraid to finance the so-called “Libyan Coast Guard”, which takes people back to the torture camps in a civil war zone.

**Even on European soil, the “fight against human smuggling”  
justifies arbitrary arrests, charges and years of imprisonment for  
people seeking protection and people showing solidarity.**

For instance, if a boat disembarks in Greece, the Greek police arrests the people they suspect of having steered the boat, called for help in distress or even just because they are the only people who speak English. The basis for this is Greek legislation, which classifies any person as a smuggler who is the driver of a vehicle which helps people without valid residence permits to enter Greece. These people are charged and sentenced for human smuggling, often with absurdly high prison sentences.

These are not tragic individual cases or errors of justice: between 2016 and 2017, a NGO in Lesbos observed 41 such cases. On an average, the accused were sentenced to 44 years, of which an average of 19 years is served in prison. In addition, they were sentenced to fines averaging 370,000 euros. The court hearings that led to these blatant sentences, however, lasted an average of only



thirty minutes. Far from the cameras and the attention of the media, these people are denied the fundamental rights to a fair trial. There is a lack of adequate translations and adequate legal assistance! The prosecution often relies solely on the testimony of the border police or on twisted statements and spurious evidence.

**Freedom for Hamza Haddi and Mohamed Haddar!  
The arbitrary imprisonment of refugees and migrants in the  
European Union must end!**

At this point we would like to tell you briefly about such a case, which was negotiated in Komotini, Greece, on 4th February 2020. Perhaps you have heard about Hamza and Mohamed through our solidarity campaign: in summer 2019 they arrived together with two other people on a small boat across the Evros, the border river between Turkey and Greece. One of them was Hamza's brother Yassine, the other one a friend of Mohamed. Hamza and his brother had met the others shortly before in Turkey, after they had left Morocco, where Hamza being a political activist was exposed to repression.

Immediately after their arrival on the Greek shore, the four of them were arrested, beaten and humiliated by Greek officials. The only person in the group who spoke English was interrogated and, in the end, forced to sign a statement in Greek which he could neither read nor understand. He later revoked it and explained that his statements had been distorted. Based on this dubious statement, Hamza and Mohamed were charged with “facilitation of unauthorized entry”, as well as “organized crime and financial gain”. These accusations being simply absurd.

**The accusations against Hamza and Mohamed are evidently  
unfounded. They are refugees, not smugglers.**

Many of the trials of the so-called “smugglers” are conducted in a similar way. Sometimes, it affects people who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, who spoke the wrong language or sent a distress call at sea. And sometimes people are affected who agree to steer the boat, in order to pay for their own passage or the one of their families. They all face the threat of a life behind bars.

On 4th February 2020, Hamza and Mohamed were sentenced to four years imprisonment in Komotini for “facilitation of unauthorized entry”. At that time, they had already spent 7 months in pre-trial detention. Their lawyer assessed that the sentence was extremely mild and emphasised that the reason for that



was the public attention organised before the trial and the amount of people who came to observe the trial in solidarity. This is not the case with the majority of the trials; we will probably not even hear about most of the cases.

We are here today to speak out and oppose this policy of criminalisation and illegalisation!

We demand freedom of movement for all and an end to Fortress Europe. Isolation, death and fear must not be a “European solution”!

We call on politicians to make solidarity and humanity the guidelines for their actions.

We call for discussions in which migration and flight are not problematized but recognised as a reality.

We call for humane solutions that counter the drawing of visible and invisible borders with alternatives and put an end to the dying of people on the move.

**Ferries instead of Frontex and solidarity instead of exclusion!**

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