

Mr

Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy of Greece

08 May 2020

Our ref: ORD/FDU/TUHO/3115/2020
Please quote when replying.

Dear Minister,

As the Executive Director of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, I am concerned about a certain type of incident occurred in the operational area of the Frontex coordinated Joint Operation (JO) Poseidon 2020/ Rapid Border Intervention (RBI) Aegean 2020, which has involved an interception of irregular migrants at sea, and their intended or subsequent return to the Turkish Territorial Waters (TTW).

On 18 April 2020, the Frontex contracted aircraft operating in the Aegean Sea in support of the above mentioned operations sighted a migrant boat with approximately 20-30 persons on board. By the time of the sighting there were both: Hellenic Coast Guard (HCG) and Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) patrolling vessels in the vicinity of the boat. HCG vessel was observed to embark the migrants on board. Approximately two and half hours after the embarkation, the HCG vessel was sighted again and this time transferring the migrants back to the migrant boat. After, a Hellenic patrol vessel towed the migrant boat towards TTW.

Taking into consideration the incident described above and to guarantee fundamental rights compliance in the operational activities at the external borders of the European Union, I invite you to internally investigate the incident. I would appreciate it if you could inform me on the outcomes of this enquiry as soon as available. Considering the fact that the border area is part of the operational area of the Frontex coordinated maritime operations, the adherence of fundamental rights in line with the European Integrated Border Management Strategy, in particular the compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, is an ultimate requirement.

Please let me assure you that I am willing to continue to provide Greece in the frontline of migration with my support while ensuring good cooperation to effectively protect the human rights of those at sea.

I look forward to receiving your reply and continuing our operational cooperation and support.

Yours sincerely,

Executive Director