

**YLVA JOHANSSON**MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
HOME AFFAIRSRue de la Loi, 200  
B-1049 Brussels  
Tel. +32-2 295 01 70  
[redacted]@ec.europa.euBrussels, 22.07.2020  
Ares (2020)3855482

Dear Honourable Member,

Thank you for your e-mail of 22 June and for sharing your concerns about the incident at the Greek-Turkish Sea border as well as relevant media reports. The European Commission shares the concerns about such allegations. A holistic approach is needed to prevent incidents that might put human lives at risk and our actions should defend our fundamental rights and values and provide assistance to those in need.

Under EU Law, Member States have the right, as well as an obligation, to protect our external borders by preventing unauthorised entries. The Commission has repeatedly stressed that any measures taken to protect our external borders must be proportionate and compliant with fundamental rights. Pushbacks are forbidden and everyone's right to apply for asylum must be respected.

However, the Commission has no power to investigate alleged misconduct by the Member States' law enforcement authorities. Such allegations should be subject to independent investigation by the national competent judicial authorities.

The Commission is following the situation in Greece closely and as soon as we became aware of the incident at the sea border on 22 June 2020, we immediately contacted the Greek authorities on this matter and enquired about its follow-up. The Greek authorities informed us that four incidents with attempted illegal crossing of Greek sea borders took place on that day in the broader area of the Greek island of Lesbos. In all four cases, people in distress were rescued and received by the Turkish Coast Guard.

Moreover, the Greek authorities underlined that they operate in full respect for international and European law and of the rules of involvement at sea and denounced the frequent lack of responsiveness by the Turkish Coast Guard to the Hellenic Coast Guard's calls, despite the former's obligations.

*Mr. Dietmar Köster**Member of the European Parliament**By E-mail only:* [redacted]@europarl.europa.eu

The Commission will continue following the situation at the land and sea border and will remain in contact with the Greek authorities. In this as in other cases, we expect national authorities to investigate with a view to establishing the facts and properly follow up on any wrongdoing if they find any.

At the same time, the EU has strongly rejected Turkey's use of migratory pressure for political purposes. We remain committed to the implementation of the 2016 EU-Turkey Joint Statement, which remains valid, and we expect Turkey to also honour its commitments. The lines of communication with Turkey remain open and active.

The need for a broader geopolitical solution that would protect people from becoming an instrument of political pressure and would prevent them from engaging in dangerous journeys remains strong. In the meantime, the Commission will consider ways to better monitor and verify reports of pushbacks at the EU external borders. We will also continue supporting the most affected Member States to manage migration according to EU law, fundamental rights and our international obligations. We count on your valuable support to achieve this.

Yours sincerely,

