


The new normality:

Continuous push-backs
of third country nationals
on the Evros river



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The undersigned organisations publish this report containing 39 testimonies of people who attempted to enter Greece from the Evros border with Turkey, in order to draw the attention of the responsible authorities and public bodies to the frequent practice of push-backs that take place in violation of national, EU law and international law.

The frequency and repeated nature of the testimonies that come to our attention by people in detention centres, under protective custody, and in reception and identification centres, constitutes evidence of the practice of pushbacks being used extensively and not decreasing, regardless of the silence and denial by the responsible public bodies and authorities, and despite reports and complaints denouncements that have come to light in the recent past.

The testimonies that follow substantiate a continuous and uninterrupted use of the illegal practice of push-backs. They also reveal an even more alarming array of practices and patterns calling for further investigation; it is particularly alarming that the persons involved in implementing the practice of push-backs speak Greek, as well as other languages, while reportedly wearing either police or military clothing. In short, we observe that the practice of push-backs constitutes a particularly widespread practice, often employing violence in the process, leaving the State exposed and posing a threat for the rule of law in the country.



Evros

PROKEKA IN FYLAKIO
& FYLAKIO RIC

The people giving the following testimonies were detained in PROKEKA in Fylakio. They state:

1. A.A., 18 years old, Algerian citizen: "I've been pushed back once. On 20.04.2018, at 21.00 we went to Ipsala with a friend from Istanbul. We crossed the river, and continued on foot. The police arrested us and requested to see our documents. Having nothing to show them, they beat us up gravely. They were 4 people, in an unmarked car, and they were armed with guns and batons. My friend was beaten up so badly that when they returned us to Turkey he had to be hospitalised. They were wearing hoods and I believe they spoke Greek to each other. They called a truck, carrying an inflatable boat they used to push us back. They took all our belongings, including our clothes. We were left with our underwear only. We waited to see if they'd give us our belongings back, but they didn't. The place they arrested us was 10 minutes walking distance from the river. It's an uninhabited area, there were fields and dirt roads, I believe it was between Feres and Didimoticho. Once back in Turkey we were stopped by the mafia. We had nothing to give them."
2. N.Y., 36 years old, Algerian citizen. "I'm aware of pushbacks being conducted by the authorities. I've heard of a lot of incidents where people drowned in the river. We were 3 people travelling together. We crossed the river at night, around 22.00. We were arrested by people wearing masks. They beat us up and took all our belongings, including our clothes. When they pushed us back to Turkey, I stayed there for about 17 days and then attempted to cross again. The pushback was conducted by Greeks and Germans. In Turkey we were stopped by the mafia, who beat us too. I know that lots of people pay them money so as to leave unharmed."
3. M.B., 31 years old, Turkish citizen. "I've been pushed back. Fearing deportation back to Turkey, I initially told the police I'm from Syria. I crossed the river with two more people, about a month ago (July 2018). I encountered two soldiers and two people in civilian clothing. They asked for our IDs, wanting to see where we're from. We didn't have any ID on us. They called for a van, and put us on board. There were two people from Syria already inside. They drove us to the river where they made us cross to the other side on a boat."

4. A.C., 32 years old, Turkish citizen. "I've been pushed back once, on 22.07.2018 to be precise. I was with a group of predominantly Arabic speakers (Egyptian, Syrian). We crossed the river to the Greek side at midnight. We waited for the smugglers truck. It arrived and we got on it. After about an hour on the road the police stopped us. I managed to escape, but saw that the rest of the group was heavily beaten up by the police. They didn't find me. The following day, I handed myself in to a police car I came across. I tried to explain the situation to them but they wouldn't listen. I was placed in the trunk of the car. They took me to the police station, I could see lots of policemen coming and going. They put me in the back of another car. Later in the day, they brought in eight men from Syria and they drove us all back to the river. The pushback was conducted by others, not the same policemen, in uniform too. They spoke Greek. I know as I speak a little Greek. They didn't wear masks. At 10.00 in the morning they put us on a boat and took us back to Turkey. They were armed."

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5. A.E., 18 years old, Algerian citizen. "I crossed into Greece at around 21.00 together with 4-5 people. We walked for about 10 minutes and then the police stopped us. We were on a dirt road close to Feres, close to Didimoticho. They asked what kind of documents we had and started beating us up. They had a black civilian car, wore civilian clothes, and had their faces covered. They beat us up with plastic batons, they spoke Greek, and some of them German. A while later a truck arrived, with an inflatable boat inside. They took all of our belongings and didn't give any of it back. They put us in the inflatable boat and forced us to cross back. The moment we crossed back we were caught by the Turkish police."

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6. H.A., 17 years old, unaccompanied minor, Afghani citizen. "The first time I crossed into Greece, around 19.00 in the evening, I was in a group of 20-30 people. We were caught by the police in Didimoticho and took everything we had, clothes, bags, mobile phones. They were wearing police uniforms. They transferred us to a police station and when it got dark they put us at the back of a truck, drove us to the border, put us in an inflatable boat and pushed us back to Turkey".

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7. M.S. 19 years old, Afghani citizen. "On the night I entered Greece, along with 15 more Afghani and Pakistani citizens, I was arrested by men in green clothes, of military resemblance, with concealed insignia. During the arrest we were beaten up and moved to a remote, abandoned detention space. We spent a few hours there and then we were pushed back to Turkey crossing the river in inflatable boats. A few hours after arriving in Turkey we were arrested by the Turkish police".

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8. S.A., 19 years old, A.M., 27 years old, and M.S. 19 years old, Afghani citizens: "We arrived around the 24th of July, we were 15-16 people, Afghans and Pakistanis, we walked in the woods for a bit and the smuggler told us we'll arrive in 5 minutes, but was lying. They arrived and arrested us. One of the policemen had his face covered, they asked us not to look at them in the eyes and every time we looked they beat up someone randomly, a person they chose each time. It was raining, we were soaked wet. They took us to a cell, they didn't give us any water or food. They beat up two men while asking them why they came to Greece. They were just looking at them, and the policemen were telling them to stop looking at them and beating them up with a baton. Early the following morning they put us in a boat and sent us back to Turkey. I had €50 in my bag, and when they gave it back to me the money was missing, as was the case with everyone's money. They also took our shoes and mobile phones. The people who caught us had a blue van. They were wearing green clothes, resembling military wear, I'm not sure if they were soldiers. They put us in a little boat and sent us back, a policeman was driving it. He returned to Greece afterwards. We walked in a forest for three hours barefoot, and then locals called the Turkish police to arrest us. They held us for four days, and then we paid for a taxi to drive us back to Istanbul".
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9. M.B., 31 years old, Kurdish from Turkey, according to his testimony he was imprisoned and tortured in his country of origin. "They caught us and put us in a military facility. They all wore military clothes except for two who were in civilian clothing. Then they took us to a police holding cell along with people from Syria. I had a smartphone, which they took along with my bag containing all my clothes. I was travelling in a group and I said I'm Syrian, so that they don't send me back. They gathered us, put us in a boat and sent us back to Turkey. I didn't say I was from Turkey as I left from a Turkish prison and was afraid they'd send me back there. I was told to say I'm from Syria and was escaping the war, and that they'd accept me that way. In the end they gathered us all up and sent us back. Thankfully I was not caught by the Turkish police, if that was the case I'd be dead or in prison".
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10. A.A., 21 years old, Egyptian citizen. "I was travelling with five more people from Egypt. We crossed river Evros to the Greek side with the smuggler at night. It was in an area with dense bushes and upwards-sloping terrain. We entered the forest, having lost our orientation. We walked without knowing where we're heading and after 1-2 hours we heard voices and saw a group of people coming towards us. When they came close, we could see they were well built and of a fair complexion. They didn't speak Greek, but a language that sounded like German. They were wearing dark uniforms; different from the ones the Greek police was wearing at PROKEKA in Fylakio later on. They asked us to stand in a line and performed a

body search. At random moments, without provocation, they started punching and kicking us. When an Egyptian man from our group tried calling a human rights organization from his mobile phone, one of the uniformed men took his phone and started beating him. Following that, they put us in a dark-colored van, resembling a civilian car and drove us to a warehouse. It took about 20-30 minutes to get there, and the road was rocky. At the warehouse, they conducted another body search, took our money and mobile phones, and asked us to strip down. They forced the whole group to knee down facing the wall. They kept us there without food or water. We must have stayed there for a long time as it was dark outside when we got out again. They put us in a white bus, with blue signs insignia on it. They drove us to the river, forced us to board on boats and returned us back to Turkey. There was no one on the opposite riverbank. After a few hours the Turkish police arrested us. They drove us to a detention center, possibly close to Edirne (Andrianoupoli), as it didn't take too long to drive from the location we were arrested".

11. S.H., 35 years old, B.B., 18 years old, Egyptian citizens: "We were travelling with 4 more people from Egypt. We crossed river Evros to the Greek side at night with a boat. On the riverbank on the Greek side there was thick vegetation and in front of us a forest with tall trees. We hid in the bushes, having lost our bearings. About an hour later, not having moved around much and not knowing where we were, we heard some people shouting at us. One of them was holding a gun and stayed further back from the 3 people that approached us. We heard more steps behind us, I believe there were more people we couldn't see, as it was dark. Their faces weren't covered. Hearing them shouting and speaking, we understood that some of them were Greek, and some were speaking another language, possibly German. We were asked to stand in a line, and they body searched us. B.B. took his phone out in order to call a human rights organization. They spotted it, and one of the people from those who were well built and with a fair complexion came close, started beating him in the head, threw him on the floor, and kicked him, before taking his phone away. They led us to a dark van, put us at the back and started driving. It was a quick drive, on a rocky road full of potholes. They took us to a small room with bars on the windows, gathered our phones and money, and stripped us down. They ordered us to kneel down with our backs against the wall. B.B. didn't comply immediately, so they beat him on the head and at the back of his neck. They kept us there for almost a full day. The following night, they put us in a white bus and returned us to the river, possibly from the same road, as the ride was brief and the road was rocky. There were more people in the bus, and from hearing them speak I could tell that some of them were Greek. They then put us back on boats and sent us back to Turkey. There was no one waiting on the other side. We walked for a little while, and before dawn the Turkish authorities arrested us and they transferred us to a detention center close by. We were then released after 1-2 days."
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12. M.M.I., 24 years old, Afghani citizen, states that 'he was lucky' and crossed the border on his first attempt: "... I'm aware of what happens in the border. Friends of mine have been pushed back. They had bought a bus ticket when the police stopped them. There were men, women and children. They beat them up, and pushed them back to Turkey on the same day. The women and the children were crying. They took their belongings and mobile phones, throwing them in the river in front of their eyes. They then pushed them back to Turkey. In Turkey they were detained for 3 days. Some were released and went to Istanbul, others were deported back to Afghanistan. I knew where they were caught so I crossed from a different road. You have to do something, Afghans in Turkey have big problems, it's not safe for them to be there".
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13. S.B. 17 years old, unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan. After arresting me, the drove me to a police station that looked like a holding cell. I was travelling with family, my uncle and my cousins. The first time, we crossed from a place with thick vegetation with a smuggler and reached the banks of river Evros on the Turkish side. There, where we boarded on inflatable boats. We were 15-17 people on the boat. We crossed the river without any problem arising, and made it to Greek soil. We split in smaller groups and entered a bushy forest. Slouching, we moved until we reached the train tracks close by. We continued south, parallel to the train tracks. About 5 hours later, we heard noise and lied down on the ground. A group of people with torches approached us and shouted at us to stand up. Some of the people travelling with us obeyed and stood up. One of the men shouting at us pointed a gun at us and ordered us to stand. They handcuffed us and asked to see our documents. They put us in a dark coloured van, without windows, and drove us to a small holding cell where they kept us. They body searched us and took our mobile phones, our clothes and some peoples' backpacks. We stayed there that night, and the following day. They didn't give us any food or water. At night, I could hear the train passing by. The following night they led us to a dark green truck, possibly a military vehicle. It was taller than the van they used when they arrested us the other day and had a window at the back. A civilian car followed the truck. We were about 20 people in the truck. They drove us back to the river where the made us pump the inflatable boats that were there. They spoke Greek to each other. They wore dark uniforms with no insignia, their faces weren't covered but we couldn't see them clearly as it was dark. They ordered us into the boats we had just inflated, along with two men had driven us there, who drove the boat. There was no-one waiting for us on the Turkish riverbank. We headed east, towards the Turkish side, and we were arrested by Turkish police the next morning. The Turkish police drove us to a detention centre close to Edirne, where they kept us for 3 days. They gave us little food and water. We were released 3 days later and returned to Istanbul. In all of my following attempts to cross into Greece, I was pushed back to Turkey in the same way. The only difference was that the 3

last times, we were driven back to the river on dark coloured buses, and once on civilian vans. In one of my attempts, one of the men slapped me when hiding in the forest because I didn't surrender myself early enough."



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The people giving the following testimonies were under restriction of freedom or under protective custody in the Fylakio RIC. They state:

1. M.H. 27 years old, Syrian citizen, states that he was pushed back to Turkey twice, in mid-August: "The first time I tried to cross into Greece, 28 of us left Edirne (Andrianoupoli) at 20.00. The group consisted of families with children and infants, single men and women. There were 7 minors. We reached the river by car, where the smuggler divided us into groups and put us in 2 boats. We crossed the river into Greece. The smuggler divided us into smaller groups and sent us to the bus station at Orestiada on foot to buy tickets. He gave us documents, saying we'll be able to purchase tickets without a problem. At the till they asked to see my passport, and I gave them the document he had given me. I believe that the bus company employees informed the police, as after waiting for 15 minutes for the bus to leave, once on the road for 10 minutes the bus stopped in front of the police station. Police officers entered and asked to see our documents. We showed them the documents we had, and the police tore them in pieces. They arrested us and led us to a holding cell. We were 7 people by that point, 3 women, 3 children, my brother and I. They performed a body search on everyone. Male officers searched the men, while female officers searched the women. They threw away all the things we had in our bags, and asked for our mobile phones and money. They gave us the money back, but broke our phones in front of our eyes. Throughout the process we were given no food or water. They even confiscated the baby formula we had. There were more people in the cell, without provisions for keeping women and children in separate cells. There were 8 beds and one toilet. We were drinking water from that toilet, as they didn't give us any. We were kept there for only 2 hours, with more people arriving in that time. Then a van came and took 25 of us back to the border, leaving us in front of the river. 5 hunky, tall men were waiting for us there. They were dressed in black uniforms and their faces were covered. They had weapons on their belts and legs. They put us on boats, and 2 more people navigated us across the river. They didn't hit anyone. They told us to look down, and every time someone looked up they hit them - lightly so as to look back down. In general they didn't touch the families, but I saw that they took the clothes of some single men travelling on their own. When they pushed us back to the Turkish side, we walked and called for help. The Turkish police came and we told them that the Greek police pushed us back. They arrested us and drove us to a detention center in Edirne (Andrianoupoli). We spent a week there; they gave us food, water and juice. Afterwards, they transferred us to a camp 20 hours from Edirne, in Urfa, where they only housed families. They sent the single men from Iraq and Syria back. They took

us to Istanbul, where we immediately met our smuggler. In two days we were back at the border. We drove to Edirne, and then crossed the border by boat.

The second time around we arrived in Greece at around 19.30. This time we were about 65 people, women, children, men, and families, from various countries. We spent a day by the river, and the next day we left at about 23.00. The smuggler took us all at a village in order to wait for more people to arrive. We waited in the forest and the police came. They showed us their credentials. We told them we've been on the road for a long time. They told us not to be afraid. 2 vehicles arrived, a large military one and a smaller one with 4 policemen. They didn't give us any food or water. I speak English, so I asked them where they'd take us. They told us they'd take us to a holding cell for a day, and then to a camp where they'd issue documents for us. They just said this so that we remain quiet and not protest. They didn't take us anywhere; they drove us back to the river. There again, men with covered faces were waiting for us. They wore black uniforms and were armed. When the policemen dropped us off at the river, they gave us back our bag, but the men in black uniforms took them, put us on boats, and pushed us back to Turkey. In Turkey, it was the same process as the last time. The third time we tried to cross, we succeeded as the smuggler took us from a different road. We passed Alexandroupoli, and 100km further we were stopped by the traffic police. (I speak English and could read the plates). They took us to a holding cell, and after to the Fylakio. I know that some of the families were sent back to Turkey."

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2. H.A. 22 years old, Iraqi citizen, tried to enter Greece accompanying his 11-year-old nephew, on the 27th of September 2018. "We crossed with a smuggler and arrived to the river by road. It was 35 of us, men, women, children, families, including some people with disabilities. After 5 hours driving the smuggler dropped us off and we walked for 2 hours to the river. He had given us an inflatable boat and a pump to cross. By the river, 2 people met us who helped us cross in groups of 8. We all made it across at around 22.00 and we walked for 15-20 minutes. We crossed a road and entered a forest to rest. At around 03.00, we heard a dog barking. A tall man with a dog approached us. He had his face covered and was wearing a head torch. He was wearing a blue uniform, like the ones worn by the policemen in the detention centre and had a gun. He was speaking Greek and called someone, who arrived a little later. He was wearing the same uniform, but his face was uncovered. He spoke English. The tall man with the dog run into the forest to catch a child that escaped. The other man led us to the road, close to the train tracks. 10 policemen were waiting for us there, wearing the same clothes. There were 3 vans without windows. There were no women police officers. The body searched the men, and used a handheld scanner to search the women. They split us into groups of men and women, and took our bags before putting us in the van. There were about 12 people in each van. After driving for half an hour, the van stopped for 20 minutes but we didn't get off. Half an hour later we reached the river. We were taken off the vans by 5 people with their

faces visible, holding batons and guns. They gave us our bags back, but threw our mobile phones in the river. A little later another car arrived, with an inflatable boat attached to its roof. They split us up in groups of 8, and a policeman navigated the boat across the river. One person resisted, and they hit him in the head.

When we crossed back to Turkey we weren't arrested by the Turkish police, as they don't patrol that area. The smugglers collaborator who was with us had managed to keep his phone hidden, so we used the GPS to find our way back to Istanbul. We walked for 5 hours and found a room in the forest, where we hid for 2 days. The smugglers car picked us up from there, and took us back to the river. We crossed back to Greece in the same way on October 1st. We walked through the forest from a different spot. We reached a road, and sat by the road. By that point we were 180 people. An army vehicle arrived. As I speak English, I asked to speak to someone from UNHCR. The police arrived in 3 vehicles, I recognised two of the vehicles, as they was the same ones they used to drive us back to the river the first time around. Again, I asked to speak to someone from UNHCR. A tall man came, showed us his card, but we refused to leave the road as we were scared that they'd push us back. A while later a bus arrived, and drove us to the police station in Orestiada. We were then transferred to Fylakio detention centre."

3. A.A., 21 years old, Syrian citizen. He stated that he was pushed back to Turkey 4 times. All of the 4 pushbacks were performed by people wearing blue uniforms and carrying guns. He said that they shouted and cursed them, and employed violent tactics. They took away their belts and shoelaces, any electronic device they had, and all belongings. They took them to a detention centre with people of many nationalities (Afghan, Pakistani, Iraqi) and when it got dark at around 19.00-20.00, they drove them back to the river in a van. There they put them on boats in smaller groups and pushed them back to Turkey. The last time he crossed the border, he was arrested and went through the reception and identification procedure, on October 10 2018.
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4. M.A., 16 years old, unaccompanied minor from Iraq. He states that he was pushed back once, in early October 2018. "We were about 20 people, (5-6 were young children). We crossed the river on a boat late in the afternoon, and started walking on a busy road. We were stopped by two policemen in a van, they had guns. They told us that they're from the police and that we shouldn't be scared. An Iranian man that spoke English was translating for us. They made some calls, and 10 minutes later a military vehicle arrived with two policemen on board arrived. It didn't have number plates. They put us on the truck and drove us to the police station. It was close to the place they caught us. On the way they gave us 3 bottles of water to be shared by the whole group. The truck had equipment for taking fingerprints, like the ones they used when they brought us here. They performed a body search on the men and put us in a cell without water and food. The cells were large rooms

with beds and a toilet. Before entering the cell, they asked us to put all our things on a table, including our money. They didn't search the women, as they didn't want to touch them and didn't have a handheld scanner. They asked them to put their belongings on the table. The following day they put us on the same van and drove us to an empty house next to the riverbank. There was a boat there. They quietly put us on the boat and we crossed back to Turkey. When boarding the boat, they threw our phones in the river."

5. R.A., 17,5 years old, unaccompanied minor from Pakistan. He tried to cross into Greece in the first 10 days of October 2018, but was pushed back to Turkey. "We were 25 people when we crossed into Greece. We got on boats in groups of 7. A smuggler was waiting for us on the other side and told us to follow him. We got to some train tracks, wanting to reach Alexandroupoli; 3 men in blue uniforms stopped us. 10 people started running, and they didn't stop them. They didn't tell us anything else. A large blue vehicle, like a bus, arrived 15 minutes later. They took the 15 remaining people in the group to a police station, 20 minutes away. There were a lot of rooms and offices, and people there wore clothes with 'Police' written on them. They body searched us and only took our mobile phones. They put us in a room with 5 more people. It was relatively clean, but didn't have a toilet. They didn't give us any food or water. We had some food on us, and they let us eat it. They were nice to us in general, and let us go to the toilet when we asked. They brought in more people, twice. In the end, we were about 100 people, only men, from various countries. At around 23.00 they put us on the same bus and drove us to the river. There was a boat, they put us in in smaller groups and a policeman drove it across the river. They threw our phone in the river."
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6. A.W., 17,5 years old, unaccompanied minor from Pakistan. He tried to cross into Greece in mid August 2018. "We were about 23 people. We crossed river Evros on a boat. The two smugglers led us to a forest to sleep. While asleep, 4 men wearing military uniforms found us. They had two dogs. They called the police to come to that spot. When they arrived they asked us to put our hands up and body searched us. They separated the people they understood to be smugglers. The police took over at that point. There were 4-5 policemen in 2 vans. They took our phones before putting us in the vans. They put the smugglers in another car. We drove for 15 minutes to a place that looked like a prison, with a large gate. We didn't go in, but waited in the van for 2 hours. The policemen were nice to us they gave us water but no food. They drove us back to the river 10 minutes away, at around 03.00-04.00. There was a boat there. A policeman put us in the boat, and a person from the military drove the boat across. They didn't give us our phones back."
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7. A.K., 29 years old, Syrian citizen. "We were 70 people when we crossed into Greece. We spent a long time on the road next to a village. The police caught us. 6 of them were wearing blue uniforms like the ones worn by at the RIC, but there were 20 more people with their faces covered, and 2 people in civilian clothing. Some people were nice to us, and when we asked for help they told us they can't help us and that they were following orders. One of them said to us that it was Merkel's orders. They kept us hidden from 11.00 when we entered Greece, until 19.00. They didn't take us to a police station. They didn't give us any food. They didn't even let us go to the toilet in the woods. They refused to call a doctor when we asked for one, as there were people in the group who were ill. There was some rubbish lying around, and some of the policemen took used bottles, and filled them with water to give to us. I tried to help an elderly woman that had a problem with her foot, but a policeman hit us both. When it got dark they put us in a van and drove us to the river. They took all of our clothes, it was terrible. The men were left with our underwear, the women with underwear and t-shirts. It was degrading. They took all of our belongings except for our passports and IDs. They burned our things once we were sent back, we could see it from a distance, electronics, clothes, food. A few days later I called my phone and it rang. I don't know what they did with it. They pushed us back on boats they were driving themselves".
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8. A.D. 32 years old, Palestinian citizen she was pushed back to Turkey 3 times. She talks about the first pushback. "We crossed the border via the river and stayed hidden in the forest for 3-4 days. At some point we ran out of food and water. I had filled a bottle with dirty water, and was using a handkerchief to filter in order to give it to my children. We were 90 people, 30 were children. Some found some beehives in the area and tried to get some honey to eat. When the beekeeper found out, he started shooting in the aid. The police heard it and they found us. 20 people from the group ran to the forest to hide, they didn't find them. The about 70 of us remaining were mainly women and children. The people that caught us were wearing blue uniforms and had guns. They treated us very badly, swearing at us in English. Some of them even hit the children. They drove us to an old room close to the river. It was a stable. It didn't have a proper floor, but dirt. It didn't have a lock, and only one window with bars. All 70 of us were in that space, some people fainted as the space was extremely confined. They took our clothes, our shoes, and our mobile phones. They left us our passports and IDs. At 19.00 the pushback started. 20 people in military uniforms and covered faces took us to the river on foot. Once there, they put us on boats in smaller groups, and we crossed the river. A policeman was looking across the river to see if it was clear to cross, and signalled to the boats to start. It was terrible, a baby was crying. A policeman asked it to stop, naturally the baby didn't stop and the policeman hit it in the face twice! The mother started to cry, and he hit her too. It's well known that if the Turkish police doesn't arrest you when crossing back, you get charged 4-5 times over the normal price by taxi drivers to drive you somewhere."
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9. Q.M., 37 years old, Iraqi citizen. He was pushed back to Turkey on the 15th of October 2018. "We were 11 people in total, 5 got away. The police found us in the forest. They didn't beat me, but I saw them severely beating up a kid from Afrika. They drove us to a holding cell in a van. It was a large old room with a filthy toilet. Some of us chose to clean it. We were about 150 people in that room, from various countries. Men, women, children, and families. The space was 5 minutes away from the river, directly next to some train tracks. They body searched us. The men were searched by male police officers, the women by female. They kept us there for a few hours, until about 19.00. They took our personal belongings, our electronics, mobile phones, and anything of value. They gave us back our documents after checking them. They kept our other belongings. They drove us back to the river in vans, where they put us in boats in groups of 12, and sent us back to Turkey. The people who drove us to the river were policemen, with their faces covered. The people driving the boats wore blue uniforms too. Only one of them was wearing a green uniform. These people weren't wearing masks."
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10. H.M., 16 years old, unaccompanied minor from Pakistan. "I tried to cross into Greece twice. My first attempt, in August 2018 failed, as I was arrested and pushed back to Turkey. I was travelling with 10-12 other people from Pakistan, and the smuggler. We reached the banks of river Evros on the Turkish side at night-time, and crossed at a point with thick vegetation and trees. We crossed on a boat. At some point the boat rocked heavily to the side and some people fell in the river. We panicked and tried to keep the boat from capsizing. I heard the people who fell in the water swimming. I don't know whether they made it back to the riverbank safe. When we reached the Greek side, we kept walking until daylight, trying to stay hidden in the bushes. Some people in the group were wet from when crossing the river earlier. Around sunset, a shepherd spotted us and called the police. A little further down, about half an hour later, we were arrested by men with police insignia. They asked for our travel documents, which none of us had. They put us in a dark coloured van, without windows, and drove us to a police station. We were kept outside initially, in a caged terrace. I could see the train tracks close by from where I was sitting, with my back on the Turkish side. At night, I saw the train passing by. When they took us in the police station, they took my mobile phone and my shoelaces. When they finished searching everyone, they put us in a van similar to the one they used to drive us to the police station earlier. The van had space for 10-15 people, but they piled 25-30 of us in there. During the transfer, 3 young men fainted. We started banging our hands on the walls of the van, until they stopped and opened the doors at the back. They took out the men who had fainted and started slapping them in their face and throwing water at them. When they woke up, they violently pushed them back in the van and continued driving. They drove us back to the river, probably on a dirt road. (The road was rocky and the van bounced around a lot). We made it back to the river, where we saw boats waiting for us. They put us on the boat and we started crossing back to the Turkish side. I looked back and I

saw them taking the batteries off our phones, which they had confiscated earlier, and throwing the phones in the river. When we landed on Turkish soil, we started walking towards Turkey, and after a little while the Turkish police arrested us and drove us to a detention centre where they kept us for 3-4 days. We were then transported to Istanbul, in a police vehicle, where they released us.”


11. O.A. 17 years old, unaccompanied minor from Syria. “I was travelling in a group of people of various nationalities. We were about 20 in total. We crossed river Evros into Greece on a boat once it got dark. When we reached the Greek side, we were arrested by a group of man dressed in black. They were well built, and wore full-face masks. They put us in a van and kept us there for a long time without food or water. When it got dark again, they drove us back to the river and put us in a boat. One of the masked men came in the boat and forced us to lie on the floor with our faces facing down. He left us on the Turkish riverbank and returned to the other side.”
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12. M.A. 15 years old, unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan. “I tried to cross into Greece 3 times, succeeding the last time. I was pushed back to Turkey the first two times, when travelling with a group of people from various countries. On my first attempt, I tried to cross with a smuggler and 12 more people. We crossed from a swampy area with thick vegetation on the Turkish side, and made it to the banks of river Evros. Once there, we boarded an inflatable boat in order to cross the river. When reaching the Greek side we entered a forest. The ground was wet as it had rained earlier that day. We started walking with 6 more men for about 4 hours between the trees, along the riverbank. Suddenly, we heard voices and fell on the ground, hiding in the bushes. The police approached us, they were wearing uniforms like the ones worn by the police men in the RIC. They shouted at us to stand up. We stood up and we boarded a dark coloured van without windows. The road was rocky and I was so terrified that I didn’t understand how long we drove for. They led us to a little room that looked more like a warehouse than a police station, comparing it to PROKEKA. We got there at about 06.00 in the morning. They asked us to hand over any documents we had, and our mobile phones. I had my original birth certificate with me, which would be essential to get reunified with my brother in Germany. The police tore it to pieces in front of my eyes. They also took my phone, and never returned it. They kept us in that warehouse for about a day, in that time, they brought more people in. After 6 hours, at around 12.00, the warehouse had filled up with people. It was people from various countries, and I recognised some Pakistani nationals among them. At about 22.00 at night, they put us in the same van that they used to drive us to the warehouse. The route we followed might have been the same, as the road was rocky and the van was bouncing around. We reached the riverbank and they put us in boats. Two policemen came with us on the boat, who made sure we got off at the Turkish side.

They then returned back to continue transferring the rest. On the Turkish side of the river, there were no Turkish policemen waiting. The second time I attempted to cross, we reached the Turkish side of the river at night, boarded on boats and crossed to the Greek side without a problem. There was thick vegetation around us and the ground was soft and muddy. We walked for a long time and reached a village. We got on a bus and travelled for about 1.5 hours. The bus was stopped by the police and they arrested us. They took us off the bus and we waited on the side of the road for the police vans to arrive. Once the vans arrived, they drove us to a police station, we stayed there briefly and they put us in the van again almost immediately. When they let us out again, 1.5 hours later, I realised that they had brought us to the same warehouse as the last time (or a very similar looking one). They body searched us and they kept us there for about half a day. The rest of the pushback was done in the same way as last time. They put us on dark coloured vans, drove us to the riverbank and the policemen took us on the other side on boats."

- 13.** R.N., 15 years old, unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan. "I was travelling with my brother. We managed to get into Greece from Evros the second time we tried. On our first attempt we were pushed back by the Greek police. More specifically, in our first attempt we crossed the river with a smuggler in a group of 18 people. As we were walking in the forest during the night a man with a dog approached us. He made a call to some people, and in a few minutes two men in a blue van arrived, they were shouting 'police'. They were wearing black uniforms and their faces were covered. They beat us up, the men, all over our bodies, with clubs and fists. They violently took our bags away and burned them in a bonfire they lit on the spot. Our bags contained all of our original official documents, our Afghani IDs as well as medical exams I did in Istanbul concerning a serious medical issue with my lower back. The only copies of documents I managed to save were photos I had on my phone, which I had on my and wasn't confiscated by the police. They then led us to a warehouse/garage where they kept us until the early morning hours. From there, two other police officers transported us to the riverbank. They swore at us and beat us, using verbal and physical violence. On the riverbank, we boarded on boats and they pushed us back to Turkey."
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- 14.** K.F., 15 years old unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan. "I tried to cross into Greece 7 times. I was pushed back to Turkey illegally 6 times. We left Edirne at noon and eventually reached the river. There were 12 of us. We waited until it was nighttime and boarded a boat to cross the river. We did so unobstructed and arrived at the riverbank on the Greek side. The trafficker told us that the town of Didymoteicho was not far from where we had disembarked. We intended to orient ourselves by using GPS on our mobile phones, but the trafficker advised us against



doing so, lest someone should notice the light of the screen, which could have resulted in our being detected. We walked through dense vegetation, as if it were a forest, and 9 of us reached a number of residences, where we were informed that we could purchase bus tickets at a small local store. The scene was most probably a village, at the entrance of which was the aforementioned store, one of the first buildings we came across upon approaching. All of us bought tickets to Athens, and I paid the woman selling them a sum of 100 euro. I saw her making a phone call, and moments later policemen arrived to the spot and arrested us. We were body-searched and stripped of our mobile phones and personal belongings. They were policemen, dressed in blue uniforms (he related them to those worn by police guards at RIC). They put us in a police van that had no windows, and for about an hour we were on a rather uneven road, as if covered in potholes and bumps. We experienced turbulence on the ride, until we eventually reached a small room, resembling some sort of warehouse or storage area, which was by no means a police station. There were other people inside that room. We were body-searched once again. We waited there for about 6 to 7 hours. During this period, the number of people in the room rose to approximately 200-300. At dawn, I believe it must have been around 4 am., we were put in large military trucks (he described a dark green colour). The road was once again quite bumpy. It took us around an hour to reach the river. We crossed a bridge and waited inside the trucks for another hour. There, we saw military officers and about 10 to 15 policemen with hidden faces, wearing masks. They physically abused many of us, commanding us in English "do not come back to Greece ever again". They took off our clothes, leaving us in just our underwear. They put us in boats, manned with two mask-wearing military members each, and transported us to the Turkish side of the river. They took off our clothes, leaving us in just our underwear. They put us in boats, manned with two mask-wearing military members each, and transported us to the Turkish side of the river. Then, they went back and used the boat to repeat the same procedure with the remaining ones of us. The policemen were present but rather than participating, they only watched and threw our personal belongings in the river. On our second attempted river-crossing, the trafficker told us that he had arranged for a taxi to wait for us on the Greek side. We remained hidden in the vegetation and tall trees for about 5 to 6 days. On the final day we were all exhausted and could not wait any longer, so we decided to leave, but we were spotted and got arrested by military members. Similarly to the previous occasion, we were taken to a warehouse-like building, but it was not the self-same one. A body search ensued, following which they kept any personal belongings we held, yet again. I saw them setting mobile phones on fire. Almost immediately, they put us in large military trucks and took us to the river. They transported us to the other side in the same fashion as the last time. In total, out of my 6 unsuccessful attempts to enter Greece, 4 were intercepted by the military, and 2 by the police."

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Xanthi

PROKEKA IN XANTHI

The following testimonies were given by people detained in the PROKEKA in Xanthi.

1. A.M., 21 years old, Pakistani citizen: "I entered Greece at the Evros region in March 2018, along with 10 more people. 10 minutes after landing on Greek soil we were stopped by men wearing black hoods and covered faces. They were wearing blue uniforms like the ones worn the policemen. I couldn't understand the language they spoke. they probably spoke Greek, as I can understand now. They arrested us and held us in a small space, in a little house close to the border. At around 02.00 the put us in a van and drove us back to the river. They didn't hit us, but they were holding batons and guns. We were in a group of single men, without women or children. They put us in a boat, and 3 policemen came with us. When we got close to the riverbank on the Turkish side, they violently threw us in the water and returned back."
2. W.H., 20 years old, Pakistani citizen: "I arrived in Turkey 3 years ago and have tried to cross to Greece to apply for asylum multiple times. I can't remember exactly how many times, but in those 3 years I must have tried about 40-50 times. They always push me back. Some of these times, the people that caught us treated us violently and inhumanely. They have broken my mobile phone, taken my personal belongings and beat me up multiple times. The Turkish authorities arrested me for trying to cross the border and I was sent to prison. I spent about 1 year in prison in Turkey. The conditions were terrible. They treated us like animals."
3. B.G., 38 years old, Afghani citizen: "I was pushed back in early June 2018, trying to cross the border into Greece. They took everything from us, even our shoes. I returned to Istanbul, and with help from a smuggler I tried to cross the border again, but I was pushed back. We had boarded a train, when the police charged in, asking for our passports. We didn't have any to show them. They took our mobile phones and led us to an underground location under a bridge. They kept more people there. At some point the drove us back to the river. These people were wearing masks. The others who first arrested us were police officers who took us from the trains to the river in a white van. Eventually, I entered Greece from the sea, entering at Alexandroupoli where we were arrested by the police and we were sent at Filakio and then to PROKEKA Xanthi."
4. S.A.B., 23 years old, Algerian citizen told us that he was pushed back to Turkey twice in August 2018: "I was arrested in Orestiada. They took me to a space that

looked like a garage, where 60 people were held. This place is in Didimoticho, close to the river. It's a ground floor room close to the train tracks probably below a bridge. A military vehicle came and they took us back to the river at around 19.00-20.00 in the evening. They put us in boats in groups of 8, after taking all of our belongings and clothes. They were violent on several occasions. The group consisted of men from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, Algeria, Syria, and Turkey, and a woman from Afrika. The military personnel wore masks. There are three spots where they push people back. Orestiada, Didimoticho, and Alexandroupoli. They never took our fingerprints. It is usual to arrest people in buses and trains."

5. M.B., 19 years old, Egyptian citizen: "I tried to cross the border with the help of a smuggler. I managed to cross into Greece a few times, but I was pushed back 4 or 5 times. A little while after entering Greece they arrested us and kept us in custody for a short period of time. Some of the times they didn't give us water or food. They then drove us back to the river. Back in Turkey the police arrested me after some of the pushbacks. They kept me for a couple of days, and then released me. I tried to cross again. I remember that in one of the attempts to cross, when we were being pushed back, they were shooting in the air to intimidate us so as to not come back."
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Drama

PROKEKA IN PARANESTI

The following testimonies were given by people detained in the PROKEKA in Paranesti.

1. E.R., 20 years old, Afghani citizen: "About two months ago, we crossed the river at night and walked for 3 hours until reaching the train tracks. The police was there and they arrested us. We were a group of 18 Afghans. They put us in a car, and 20 minutes later drove us to a detention centre. At around 23.00, about two hours later, they took us back to the river. Their behaviour was relatively decent, but they didn't give us any food. Some people were eating food they had brought with them. People with babies were giving food to them. They body searched us when we arrived at the detention room. They took our belongings and put them in a bag. We were kept there for 28 hours, without giving us any food. They only gave us water. They gave us back our belonging, the bags with our clothes, except for our phones, which they threw in the water in front of our eyes. They were all wearing military uniforms, both the people that arrested us, as well as the people who pushed us back. Their faces were visible. They put us in the boats in groups of 10-20 people, and they were fast at returning us back. By the end, we were about 150-160 people. People arrested before and after us."
2. M.U.A. 22 years old, and N.S. 20 years old. Afghani citizens. They told us that they've been pushed back to Turkey twice: "The first time we crossed, it was about 1-1.5 months ago. They arrested us and took us in a space with lots of people. We stayed there for 6 hours, and then they pushed us back. They only let us take our clothes and money. They left us barefoot and took the rest of our belongings (mobile phones and other electronics). We were pushed back barefoot. We stayed in Istanbul for 4 days, and then crossed again. They arrested us again, and kept us in a space for 8 hours. They arrested us and pushed us back during daytime. They took all our belongings except for the clothes we were wearing, and pushed us back barefoot. In both occasions they were wearing military uniforms, and their faces were visible."
3. W.U.S., 18 years old, Afghani citizen: "When we crossed the river, we walked for some time on the road until we got arrested. It was night-time. At around midnight, they led us to a space where they held more people from various countries. They kept us there until 19.00-20.00 the next day, when they took us back to the river and pushed us back to Turkey. They were wearing military uniforms and their faces were uncovered. They immediately took our shoelaces and belts. Later on, they body-searched us. They gave us nothing to protect us from the cold, they didn't let us speak, and they took all our belongings".

4. M.M., 21 years old, and S.M. 18 years old, siblings from Afghanistan: "We crossed in a little boat, us and a couple. The woman was pregnant. We were on the boat for about 6 hours. The women felt unwell and we stopped at a riverbank for her to get off. We wanted to continue, but couldn't as the boat was damaged, so we had to get off. The police caught us in a forest, put us in a vehicle, and drove us to a space with 70-80 people inside. They body searched us and took all of our belongings except for our money. They kept us there until it got dark, then the put us in a vehicle resembling a refrigerator truck and drove us back to the river. The drive from the point the police arrested us to the detention centre was about 3 hours. Their behaviour was terrible. They tazed anyone that protested. They were holding batons. The people who arrested us put us in a van with 6 more people inside, and drove us to the detention centre. There they didn't let you move or speak. The truck they put us in at night had a tiny window. We complained that there isn't enough oxygen. They hit anyone that spoke, and threw hot water at us to stop shouting. One person had breathing problems and kept changing places in order to be able to breath. They were wearing military uniforms and had their faces covered. When we arrived at the river, they started putting groups of 10-15 people on boats and pushed them back to Turkey. There was a guy with sunglasses and a moustache that was particularly severe. He was there the second time they pushed us back, and he treated us differently. The people that arrested us the first time were in civilian clothing, short trousers and shoes. The people that drove us to the detention centre were wearing clothes like the people here (in Paranești PROKEKA). The people who put us in the truck were wearing military t-shirts and green trousers."
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5. F.A. 21 years old, Pakistani citizen: "I've been pushed back once in the process of attempting to come to Greece. It was in early June 2018. We were a group of 6-7 people when we crossed the border. The smuggler got lost on the way. We run out of supplies and decided to hand ourselves over to the police. We passed the bridge and arrived at a gas station where they were policemen. They made a phone call and a van arrived. They put us in the van and drove us to a police station. They held us there for one day. The following night Greek military personnel arrived at about 22.00 and drove us back to the river. There were 60-70 more people with us. The majority was people from Pakistan and Afghanistan. There was a family in the group too. 2 people tried to escape and they beat them up. When we got back to Turkey we went to the bus station and took a taxi back to Istanbul".
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Additionally to the testimonies laid above:

- the I.A.E. family contacted us. M.N, Z.M., Z.A., S.R., Syrian citizens. They tried to cross the border into Greece on the 9th of September 2019, in order to apply for international protection: "We are refugees and we have no other way of getting to Europe. We crossed the border at around 8-9. The smugglers left us at a village at the border. We walked for a bit and asked a Greek person where we have to go to apply for international protection. 10 minutes later a police van arrived. They arrested us and drove us to a detention center about 10-15 minutes away from where they caught us. We thought they'd take us to a camp and that we'd be safe. They started looking through our things, their behavior was terrible and insulting. They then told us that we'd be able to continue towards Athens. They threw us out of the van like animals, and told us to throw our stuff on the side. They started searching our things by force, kept our mobile phones, searched our bags, and then put us in a cell in the police station. At 09.00 in the morning we asked them to let an old man from Syria to open the bag in order to take some medication but they refused. We hadn't eaten since they arrested us. At some point in the morning they let me open my bag, and I took some food that we had. I gave some to the old man. We weren't given any water during the many hours we were held in the cell. When we woke up in the morning there were more people in the cell, young people mainly. We asked them where they're from but they didn't answer. We saw them taking their fingerprints. They didn't take fingerprints from us. There were couples, families and single men from Turkey. One of them spoke very good English, and was speaking to the policemen. A while later, they transferred them elsewhere. They beat up most of the men, but didn't touch us women, and children, even though they did push us around when getting on and off the van and when getting on the boat. They beat up a lot of people, mainly from Syria. They stripped the men down and left them only with their underwear and a t-shirt. They didn't touch the women. I'm (I.A.E) 50 years old, another woman who was 60 years old was with her husband, who was 75 years old and couldn't walk. There was another woman with serious health issues. There was also another gentleman with his wife and 4 children. Their behavior towards the elderly man was terrible. When we reached the boats, they threw him in violently. When he tried to complain, they hit him with a paddle on the legs and lower back in order to be over with the whole process quickly so as to not alarm the authorities on the other side of the border. They treated us like animals. They hit some people with the paddle, others with batons, others with pieces of wood, in order to make us go faster. The people who arrested us were wearing blue uniforms. Later on, the people who took over were wearing military clothes and had their faces covered. We stayed there for one night and the following day they took our belongings. They burned our clothes, our documents, and our mobile phones. At around 01.00 at night they put us in a white van, drove us to the river, put us on boats and sent us back to Turkey. Throughout the drive, a police car at the front and a military truck at the back accompanied us. When we reached the river,

there were two boats waiting for us. One fit 6 people and the other one 5. One of the masked men was driving the boats back and forth. He threw us in the mud and left. We reached the Turkish side having nothing on us, not even our phones. They kept them at the police station. We walked towards Turkey, and half an hour later the army captured us. They held us for for 3 days.”

- Finally, M.F.A, a Syrian citizen, told us that he has been pushed back to Turkey 6 times, in the period from December 2017 to June 2018: «I crossed with a group of people, usually 10-15. We were looking for the Reception Identification Centre or a police station, in order to seek help and register officially, but we got caught every time and were pushed back to Turkey. They were using a white truck with benches inside. It was the same truck every time. When we were captured during the night, we were usually pushed back immediately. If we were captured during the day, they kept us in a detention room and were sending us back on boats at night. Once, in Soufli, we were captured by the military, and they pushed us back. The first 5 pushbacks were performed by the military and the last one by the police. The boat had space for 6-7 people and 2 people from the military that were driving it. They took us to the other side of the river, and shot in the air so as to alert the Turkish authorities to come to arrest us. Most of the times no-one showed up. The first 5 times, in the detention room, the police body searched us and kept our personal belongings (mobile phones, documents). They gave us back our documents when putting us on the boats throwing our mobile phones at the river. The last time, in June, we weren't pushed back by the military but by people wearing black-grey uniforms. Their faces were covered with masks and they spoke Greek and good English. They treated us very badly and even mocked a woman who asked for some milk for her child. They beat up a man from Morocco for saying he was from Syria. On my last attempt, I was arrested by the Turkish police after the pushback, and was transferred to a military detention centre along with other people. They separated Syrians from non-Syrians. They let the families go, and asked the rest to sign a document stating that we'll voluntarily return to Syria. The others signed, but I refused. They threatened me that they'd force me to sign it and that they'd torture me until I did. In this way I was forced to sign it. They put us in a truck two days later and drove us to Bab Al Hawa, at the Turkish-Syrian border where we were captured by islamist forces of Jabhat Al Nusra. Thankfully we were released. I returned to Turkey, and managed to enter Greece.”
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The practice of push-backs is prohibited both by Greek and EU law, as well as by international treaties and agreements signed and ratified by Greece. Pushbacks constitute an unofficial practice, going against official processes and protection mechanisms concerning the irregular entry and stay in Greece, as well as official return and deportation procedures. The practice takes place in violation of the Greek constitution (article 2, on the protection of human dignity), the Geneva Convention on Refugees (denying people the fundamental right to seek international protection), the European Convention of Human Rights (article 3, on the prohibition of torture and any kind of inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (specifically, article 4, on the prohibition of torture and inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, article 18, on the right to seek asylum, and article 19 paragraph 1, on the prohibition of collective deportations, and paragraph 2, on the prohibition of deportation, removal, or extradition from the state of persons that face grave danger of death penalty, torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment).

The principle of non-refoulement, is considered as a core principle of international customary law and takes effect from the moment a person is under the jurisdiction of a state, regardless of the stage of the official processes. On top of the explicit provisions of article 33, paragraph 1 of the Geneva convention, it is present in most international treaties and conventions protecting human rights, such as article 3 of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, article 16 of the The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, as well as regional human rights protection mechanisms. In addition, the United Nations Committee on Human Rights considers the principle of non-refoulement as an inseparable element of protection against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as protection from arbitrary loss of life. The European Court of Human Rights has expressed a similar judgement in *Soering vs United Kingdom* ruling (paragraph 88).

According to preliminary observations of the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment


or Punishment (CPT) published following a visit in Greece in April 2018¹ «The delegation received several consistent and credible allegations of informal forcible removals (push-backs) of foreign nationals by boat from Greece to Turkey at the Evros River border by masked Greek police and border guards or (para-)military commandos. In a number of these cases, the persons concerned alleged that they had been ill-treated and, in particular, subjected to baton blows after they had been made to kneel face-down on the boat during the push-back operations. These allegations...displayed a similar pattern...». In the report, the Committee urges the Greek authorities to prevent any type of push-back.

Furthermore, in a report by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, published in 6/11/2018 following a visit to Greece in the period 25-29/6/2018, on page 3 point (7), and page 12 point (64) there is reference to push-backs and the fact that the practice has not been investigated or answered for by the competent Greek authorities, regardless of the repeated inclusion of the subject in reports by international and human rights organisations.²

According to some of the testimonies above, Syrian and Iraqi single men are repeatedly pushed-back to their countries of origin by the Turkish authorities. In effect, this leads to the potential arrest, interrogation, and prosecution in general, which constitute the reasons they fled their countries for and tried to enter to Greece in order to seek protection.

When referring to persons that are exposed to further danger and harm caused by push-back operations, we have to make a particular mention to the treatment of vulnerable groups, and especially unaccompanied minors, who are exposed to illegal violence against their best interest. This practice not only fails to prioritize unaccompanied minors, single-parent families, victims of torture and sexual violence during the reception process, but excludes and ostracizes vulnerable groups from the process itself against any notion of their best interest and the Greek, EU law,

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1. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-publishes-preliminary-observations-after-its-visit-to-immigration-detention-and-psychiatric-establishments-1>
 2. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CommDH%282018%2924%20-%20Greece%20report_EN.docx.pdf




and International law, Specifically, unaccompanied minors describe the experience of push-backs as a moment of great confusion and distress, as their journey to seek safe international protection is prolonged in a painful and incomprehensible way. Often, they become victims of human trafficking through being exposed to networks of exploitation, as well as being forced into taking part in illegal activities, in order to be able to pay smugglers so as to cross the border again.

It is particularly alarming, that despite publications related to deaths of refugees, by drowning in the Evros river, push-back operations are continuing at a steady pace, exposing said people to grave danger in case they will reattempt to enter Greece. This is in violation of article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights, on the protection of human life. It is also particularly alarming that in a lot of the testimonies, there is clear mention of the participation of persons wearing insignia that belong neither to police forces, or the military.

In addition, according to the testimonies laid above, people who are pushed-back are being detained, in violation of article 5 of the ECHR, as said the detention is not based on an official process, but is enforced irregularly, and with absolute secrecy. Furthermore, we see a multitude of cases of persons who try to enter Greece in order to seek international protection, and contact our organizations due to fear of being pushed-back to Turkey. The competent authorities though, deny that they have arrested the said individuals who in sequence are being pushed-back. We become aware of this when they get in touch again from Turkey, to report their forced removal from Greece. We observe that the employment of push-back practices is a fact that has become known among refugees and migrants, as seen from the events of the 16/10/18 with the road block of the Kavali-Orestiada regional road. The purpose of this action was to make themselves visible, through their self-provoked arrest and prosecution for obstructing public transportation (Testimony No. 2, Fylakio RIC).

Finally, further to the violation of regulations that completely prohibit the push-back operations in themselves, the employment of these practices brings to light a wide array of actions violating disciplinary and criminal law by the persons conducting the push-backs. People are detained in



degrading and inhuman conditions, without separation of men and women detainees. There is no provision of food, and in a vast majority of cases, no provision of water, in violation of article 3 of the ECHR. In addition, there are testimonials describing the use of violence, as well as the irregular confiscation of personal belongings of refugees (documents, mobile phones, and clothes). In a great number of the testimonies we observe inhuman and degrading treatment of men, women, and children, by people conducting the push-backs (stripping down by force, forcible removal of headscarves).

Taking the information laid above into account, the undersigned organizations, urge the competent authorities to investigate the incidents described, and to refrain from engaging in any similar action that violates Greek, EU law, and International law.

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