



ΠΑΝΤΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΩΝ & ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΩΝ

Crisis upon crisis: theoretical and political reflections on Greece's response to the 'refugee crisis'

Dimitris Parsanoglou

“Migrations: Interdisciplinary Challenges”

UCRC – University of Crete

Rethymno, 17-18 October 2019

Crises

This cannot be done; no matter how much money you get, even if you get 10 billion euros, you cannot enlarge Chios

Spokesperson of the Coordinating Body for the Refugee Issue, 15 June 2016

The fact that according to the Common Statement a person could be returned and the fact that sanctions are imposed to returned people constitutes a direct breach of the Geneva Convention by establishing an à la carte frame. The concept running the Statement is the instrumentalisation of refugees. In addition, Turkey is considered quasi automatically as a 'safe third country', which in many cases is misleading if not dangerous for some people who will be sent back.

Former Senior Advisor of the Alternate Minister of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction responsible for Migration Policy, 9 June 2016

Crises

- 1. The deal effectively minimized the flows*
- 2. Greece cannot in any way handle the refugee crisis alone*
- 3. The deal aims at stopping the smuggling networks*
- 4. Thanks to the deal Turkey undertakes for the first time the responsibility to create some kind of infrastructure to deal with people who either way arrive in the country and stay there for a certain period of time*

**Senior Advisor of the Alternate Minister of Interior and
Administrative Reconstruction responsible for Migration Policy,
10 June 2016**

Crises

If there is no field research and ask the asylum seekers themselves, we cannot draw any conclusion. My personal take is that the crucial factor for the sharp decrease of migrant flows if you compare this with the previous summer is the closure of Northern borders of the country [Greece]. In my opinion, I don't think that Turkish authorities do something more or something less than what they did before. This is my perception; and it is based on a very simple assumption, that someone might be a refugee, but he is not stupid. Neither he has such a problem of access to information. Everyone has a mobile phone, with internet access, they read the same things I can read more or less. Certainly, it is a situation that rumours spread suddenly like a fire, for example that borders opened in Skopje [means Macedonia], and suddenly there is a move to enter Skopje with sometimes dramatic consequences like when they tried to cross the river and people drowned or this that happened in Moria where they revolted because it was suddenly heard that they would be moved to Turkey; in situations like that, this happens, but I think that they do have basic information. And the basic information is that if you go to Greece, you are stuck!

**Head of the Department of Training, Quality Assurance and Documentation of
the Asylum Service, 23 September 2016**

Reversal

Average Arrivals to Greece and Italy per Month
January to September 2016



* data.unhcr.org/mediterranean as of 7 October 2016

The long summer of migration

The focus in Brussels, Strasbourg and many capital cities was not on local situations but on rules and principles to re-establish an orderly asylum system, either by forcing countries to abide by existing standards or by creating a new system. Meanwhile local people in Sicily helped with onward travel by giving directions, buying train tickets or even by giving lifts to asylum seekers. Volunteers at transit hotspots like Milan, Athens and Calais provided support by distributing clothing and food, and offering legal advice or medical assistance.

**Karakayali, Serhat and Kleist, Olaf (2016) “Volunteers and asylum seekers”,
FM Review, 51, 65-67.**

The 'new patriotism of solidarity'

2015 was the year of the big reversal. (...) The huge increase in the numbers of refugees and migrants who came in Greece in the second semester of 2015 tested once again the cultural reflex of the Greek society and, this time, something like a miracle happened. In the field of welcoming the stranger, where for a long time there was a tough confrontation between the two aspects of 'hospitality', the 'love' and the 'fear' for strangers, a dominant attitude emerged that seemed to overcome the contradictions and discordances that characterise the historic consciousness of difference in our country: the 'solidarity towards refugees'. Despite the flaws and the delays, despite the contradictory attitudes and the negative examples, Greece has passed this test described by many as a 'crisis within the crisis' with an unexpected success.

Papataxiarchis, Evthymios. 2016. "A big reversal: The 'European refugee crisis' and the new patriotism of solidarity", Sygchrona Themata, 132-133: 7-28.

Humanitarianisms

You don't get mixed up with development and you don't get mixed up with human rights, that is none of your business. You certainly do not speak out because that is dangerous. The whole thing is action-orientated and it's morally self-justifying because when you provide humanitarian aid you are doing something good.

While speaking for the new model:

Here you would actually say, there is no way we can handle a situation without linking up with human rights issues, without linking up with development, to understand the real impact. We have to be part of the political process leading to peace, that is what we are really there for.

Mikael Barfod, Senior official at the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO)

Criticisms

- offering an 'illusion of protection', which normalises the existence of stateless people and impairs the implementation of political solutions while it classifies people according to their alleged worthiness of protection, aid and relocation (Narkunas 2015).
- the focus is reduced to specific material needs demanding a humanitarian intervention, while the political reasons for which they have become refugees at the first place are concealed (Malkki 1996).
- humanitarian actions run by IOs, such as the UNHCR, and NGOs in conflicting border zones are actually part of a global 'policing of populations' (Walters 2002).
- border and migration controls are legitimised as 'humanitarian actions' on the basis that these activities serve the identification and hence the protection of refugees (Hess and Karakayali 2007; Pallister-Wilkins 2017).
- refugee protection through humanitarian interventions is considered as part of the 'global migration management' (Scheel and Ratfisch 2014).

Actors in place

1. Representatives of national and local authorities, such as officers and officials of relevant services, e.g. Asylum Service, First Reception Service, municipal services etc.
2. Members of EU institutions and agencies, such as the EASO and FRONTEX, but also of international organisations, such as the UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) etc.
3. Paid members of NGOs with a stable working relation to a specific organisation.
4. Volunteers-members of NGOs.
5. Individual volunteers without stable link to any specific organisation.
6. Activists, members of a specific political/social organisation or movement.
7. Independent activists acting on individual or ad hoc terms.
8. Members of local initiatives/communities, such as local assemblies, collective/community kitchens, social clinics, cooperatives etc.

A typical day in Lesbos...

Let's say that on a regular day 7-8 boats were arriving, which is not much neither few. '**Platanos**' [the ad hoc collective that people from different places created there] had a space of around 200m², a squat behind the municipal pumping station and in front of a small park. There, Platanos had established a structure with a kitchen that did not provide lunch but milk and tea. (...) The first thing we were doing was to stabilise the boat, so that one by one they could get off. Then we took off their life vests and we led them to the camp. (...) When we were finishing, **UNHCR** vans were coming and they were moving them to **Camp 1**, in the outskirts of the village, about one kilometre. There, they were entering and they were also given if they wanted some clothing and food. There the registration was taking place. They were dividing the Syrians from the one side and from the other all those who were from other countries. And then, they were waiting the buses, I don't know how many hours they were waiting before they got on the big buses to go to **Moria**. Moria was an open camp, even after the [EU-Turkey] deal. This camp was run by the **Greek state** from the beginning. (...)

A typical day in Lesbos...

There, there was another registration. More formally this time. They were given papers, **Police** was also there. I never got in there. There, they were passing a proper **committee**, with the presence of **police officers and judges**. They were giving an interview properly and they were declaring their country of origin. They were given a white paper, with which they could leave. (...) Those who had money, they were finding a ship and they were leaving; those who didn't have, they were waiting for their folks to come from the other side [Turkey], either they were staying inside Moria or in **Kara Tepe**, in a space owned by the **City**. In Kara Tepe, living conditions were much better in relation to Moria. When the first registration was passing, Syrians were sent directly to Kara Tepe. (...) There were times that Moria was full, so they were going to another camp, we were calling it the **afghan camp**, at the "Better days for Moria". A guy who had created an NGO was running it, he is now in Elaionas [camp in Athens], a Greek-Cypriot. They were British, I think. It was just beside Moria. Usually Pakistanis were living there, because Syrians had money and they were leaving, while Afghanis were going to Kara Tepe. Iraqis were not so many, they were staying with the Syrians, they were few. At **Tsakmakia**, there was a **no border kitchen**. This is near the port. **German antifa** had created this. There, the food was very good, and they were staying in rudimentary tents, mostly men from Algeria, Morocco, these countries. It was poor but the food very good. (...)

Interview with Greek man, activist/volunteer in Lesbos and Eidomeni in 2015-16.

Osmosis to confusion

This was fascinating...The Spanish coastguard was the one that was managing the whole thing. I remember asking why is the Spanish coastguard doing it? And apparently, what have happened back in 2015 when it was getting out of control, since Spanish coastguard people came and started doing such a good job that none ever replaced them. There was the lighthouse NGO, so lighthouse, you could be part of the lighthouse...they were scanning they had infrared and all that and they would talk to the coastguard and then the coastguard. So, one of the camps was lighthouse. There was another camp, I forget the name, there was a second one. There were a couple different organizations; they had clean clothes and tea.

Interview with American volunteer in Lesbos

Stabilisation

(...) you could see ok by August this will be done because there were the big army military ships, I forget the names of them, that were turning the boats back and stuff like that. But then they started coming at night instead, so there were ways around it, you know there were different strategies.

Interview with American volunteer in Lesbos

Professionalisation

Emergency support in Greece

EU funding of **€83 million*** provides tens of thousands of refugees and migrants in Greece with shelter, food, hygiene, child friendly spaces, education, family reunification assistance and protection.



EU humanitarian aid partners

UNHCR
Red Cross
International Rescue Committee
Danish Refugee Council
Médecins du Monde
OXFAM
Save the Children
Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund

*first tranche of total € 300 million of funding for 2016



1. UNHCR (25 million euros)
2. International Federation of the Red Cross (15 million euros)
3. International Rescue Committee (10 million euros)
4. Danish Refugee Council (8 million euros)
5. Save the Children (7 million euros)
6. Médecins du Monde (7 million euros)
7. OXFAM (6 million euros)
8. Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (5 million euros)

The joy of joint partnerships

So, we also have a new department that called: "Reception and social integration of refugees and immigrants." It's a department that's been created from scratch, from the... it's a department of the municipality. So we basically started to create a service to empower the role of the municipality in that issue. So, we are collaborating with big humanitarian organisations who implement actions and programmes for refugees. For example, we have signed an MoU with Mercicorps and we are going to sign one with IRC, the International Rescue Committee. We have also an MoU with Libraries without Frontiers, alongside with SOS Children Villages and they are implementing an educational programme (...) And the second big action that we are doing, we are participating in the scheme of UNHCR on housing. Temporary housing for refugees and relocation beneficiaries along with other NGOs: Praxis, Arsis etc., etc. (...) We are collaborating with a lot of NGOs, officially and unofficially. We are participating in the steering committee of Victoria square, there are 15 NGOs there who have day centres, they are providing clothing, food etc. And we are in the coordination committee, just to have an idea what is happening. Of course, we don't have the same views. We are an institution, they are NGOs. They have different kind of concerns. But we found an equilibrium and things are working quite nicely without...

Vice Mayor of Athens for Migrant and Refugee Issues, June 2016

Sovereignty and its discontents

Greek authorities are responsible; we have no competence whatsoever, we just offer consultancy

Almost every expert/member of EU agencies and international organisations, such as EASO, Frontex, UNHCR etc.

The logic of national sovereignty cannot prevail over the common European rules, when it comes to the refugee problem. Some say that there is no possibility that the European Union can impose what each member state is going to do with its borders, because this is a question of national sovereignty; but when it comes to economy, the issue of sovereignty and therefore of democracy, simply disappears. Some months ago, we all witnessed an attempt of the European Union to impose its own rules, the one-way street of austerity, on a country that had democratically elected a government with a different programme. And we were led to a thriller, where the outcome was 'take it or leave it'. Today that we are in front of a crisis that transcends Europe there are no common rules and some countries can, in the name of sovereignty, close their borders.

Alexis Tsipras, 11 March 2016

Working together...

The Emergency support instrument is a faster, more targeted way to respond to major crises, including helping Member States cope with large numbers of refugees, with humanitarian funding channelled to UN agencies, non-governmental organisations and international organisations in close coordination and consultation with Member States.

European Commission, “Managing the Refugee Crisis. EU Financial Support to Greece”, 1 September 2016

The problem begins for me, when you don't have fast solutions for the people... ok? For me, it's crazy to say: “Please do something for the unaccompanied minors.” You are here, you are the biggest organisations, please act and act fast. Ok, if I... I see that ok the Greek state has a lot of paper work to do, it's obvious. Ok, if you are faster from me, take the money and do something. Don't stand. This is my only concern. For now, we didn't see that and at the same time we had the pressure to evacuate Idomeni. And you see what happened. Ok, we evacuated Idomeni, we were very tight and very proud for that, but at the same time we had the criticism that: “Ok, the camps that you created are not perfect.” We know they 're not perfect, of course. First please help us to do something inside the camps, to improve the conditions and second, let's have together a project how we are going to create together new camps in order to accommodate the people from September and on. That was the main idea and remains the main idea for the ministry.

Senior advisor of the Alternate Minister of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction responsible for Migration Policy, June 2016

Working together...

There was a lot of tension. A lot of tension yeah. It was a difficult situation because it was a very chaotic environment. So, there are individuals that they are just like me who are trying to help and we just see a need and try to fill it. And then there were the UNHCR. In their mind, they were in charge but the truth was that no one was in charge, it was totally chaotic. They would get upset that people like me were driving people around because it was out of their infrastructure, like. But there was no infrastructure so I was yelled at... but I saw people, other volunteers like me being yelled at... because you know they were like you are creating more problems than...we didn't feel.... Then there was frustration on our side, like if you are in charge why aren't you doing more? Because obviously, what you are doing is not working. So, there was a lot of tension. I think all the sides needed to exist because those people once they put their feet on the ground, they needed help immediately and then I think the larger NGOs were doing things to get infrastructure in place. So, two months later when new people came there, it was like more structured the thing. There was a lot of tension...yeah...a lot. For example, when I first got there, you know I knew in my mind my job was to drive people, but I was planning to go and coordinate with the people at PIKPA first. But as soon as I left the airport there were people walking, so I just pulled off and pick some of them up because I had an empty car. You know, that's why I am there. But later I learned that that was illegal what I have done. I should have called the police, I was violating all these things you know...

Interview with American volunteer in Lesbos

After the Summer of Migration: what the 'crisis' has left behind



Hotspot 'clopen' spatialities

A woman from Afghanistan travelling alone, describes the end of her time in Moria as follows:

After 24 days I went to the office of the UNHCR and said that I could not bear it anymore, that I was a women traveling alone. So I was given permission to move to Kara Tepe. The interpreters had given me that hint.

Kara Tepe is an open refugee camp owned by the City of Mytilini and run by the UNHCR. Mohammed, a young migrant from Pakistan, also managed to escape from Moria and found refuge in PIKPA, an autonomously organised shelter for minor refugees:

Then, the police suddenly started to arrest Pakistanis, in order to deport them to Turkey. I also heard when they called my name. But I went to hide in the kitchen for the whole night. The next day, I managed to leave Moria. There was a Syrian family with small children that wanted to leave. They told me and I understood, that I was in Moria illegally, and threw me a blanket. Together with them, I reached the fence, where I could exit through a hole. Then I took a taxi and went to PIKPA, where they gave me a lawyer.

Hotspot temporalities: registering and processing

I arrived in Lesvos on the 19th of March [2016]. [...] At the beach, Medecins Du Monde were already waiting for us. They cared well for us, and gave us a number for the registration in Moria. But Moria worked differently than we were told. We expected that we would go to Moria, be registered, and would then be able to continue our journey. That was not the case anymore. For one, we could not be registered on the the 20th of March because that day, the NGOs left the camp. We were only registered on the 21st of March. But they did not do the small interview, we were brought to the offices of EASO immediately. However, there we only encountered Greek police. Without telling us what would happen, the gate behind us was shut and we were locked up for two days. [...] In our room, which was big enough for 15 people, we were 25 altogether. It was cold, and there was only one toilet for everybody. On the second day the Greek policemen told us that we would be released soon, but this only happened after five days. As we learnt later, refugees inside the camp went on strike for us. We were only examined by a doctor after seven days. I had an injury on my foot, and the police escorted me to the doctors, who only gave me two pills, that was all. [...] Already on the first day, Greek officers took our fingerprints. In the same room, they also took photographs of us. Until the 9th of April, we were not given any information about our rights. On the 29th of March, the NGOs returned, and we were told that all of us had to apply for asylum, otherwise we would be deported to Turkey. The police also said so.

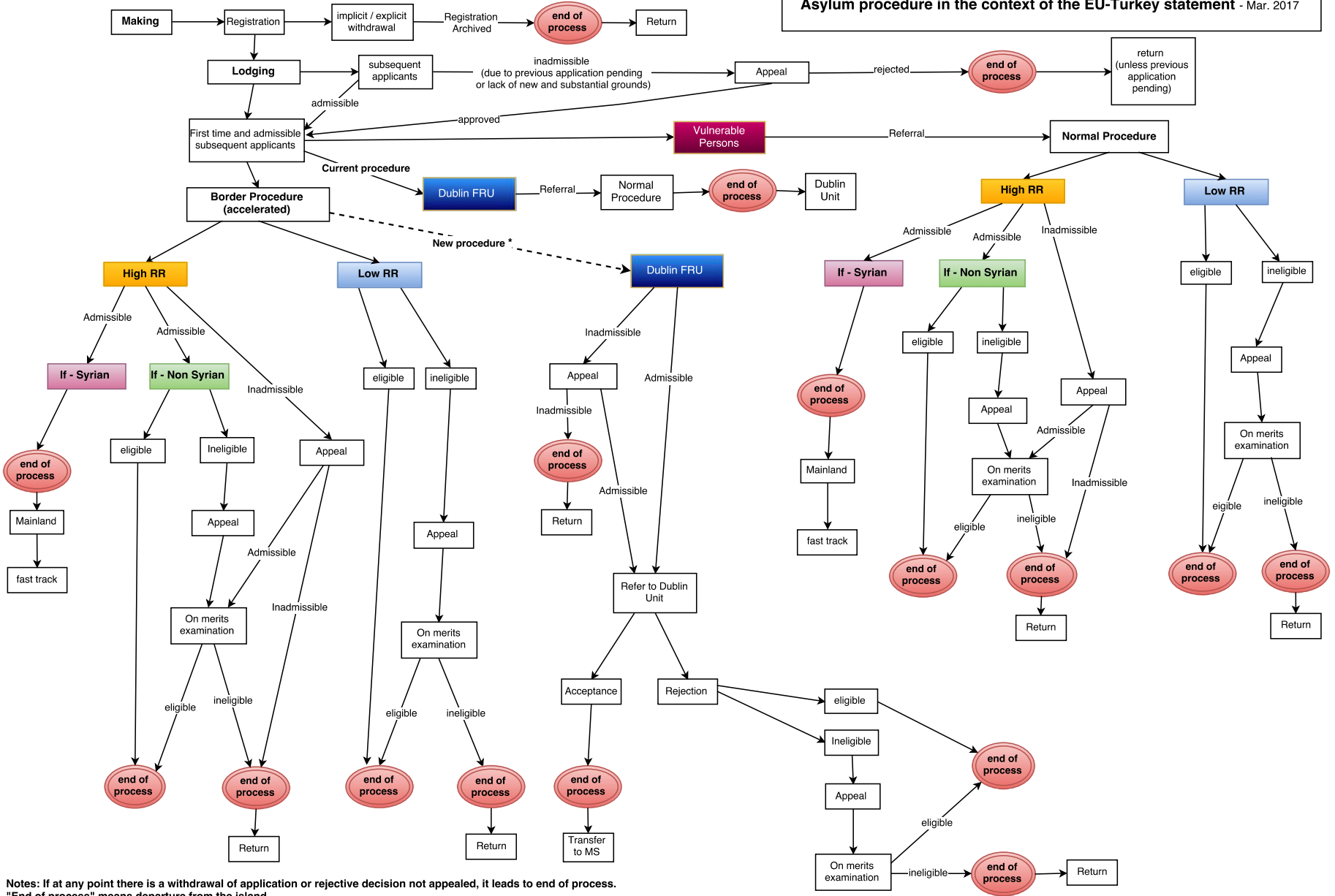
Afghan woman describing her first days in Lesbos

Hotspot temporalities: detecting vulnerability

Persons who correspond to the vulnerability criteria set by the Greek asylum law, Article 14 § 8:

- unaccompanied minors;
- persons suffering from a severe disability or serious incurable disease;
- elderly;
- pregnant women as well as those who have recently given birth;
- single-parents with minor children;
- victims of torture, rape or other forms of serious psychological, physical or sexual violence;
- persons with a posttraumatic stress disorder, in particular survivors or members of the victims of ship disasters;
- victims of human trafficking.

Asylum procedure in the context of the EU-Turkey statement - Mar. 2017



Notes: If at any point there is a withdrawal of application or rejective decision not appealed, it leads to end of process.
 "End of process" means departure from the island
 *: Legislative change required

Shifting geographies of control or the multiple layers of the EU border regime

Spatio-temporal dichotomies:

- 'hotspot' and 'non-hotspot' territory;
- pre-identification and post-identification, including initial investigation of one's condition;
- island and mainland;
- Greece or Turkey depending on the outcome of her/his demand;
- Greece and other EU+EEA member states;
- application for relocation, acceptance or rejection of the demand;
- transmission of the files to other countries, acceptance or rejection;
- trip to the destination, while living in formal or improvised camps in the Greek mainland, in accommodation places provided by the UNHCR, local authorities, international or national/local NGOs or informal projects of housing provided by activists and people in solidarity with refugee and so on;
- trip back home, sponsored by the IOM through EU/AMIF funded projects.

Revisiting sovereignty and humanitarianism

Something new, it's something new. For all the European Union countries it's something new, I think. Until now we had Africa as a paradigm you know... It's completely, completely different. No, we don't have in Greece a crystal ball but I imagine that we are going to change a little bit the way that they are acting and this has to do also with the Greek state. How you are going to pass the message: "Here you have to follow rules, you have to respect the laws" etc., etc. And you have to help. You are not creating something on your own, it's not a new system. It's already a system that you have to support. We are going to see. It's not easy. But the whole you know, picture that they are passing, that ok "Poor Greece, what they have to do, they don't know anything", I disagree with that completely, no! You know, we are the one that tried to save all the dignity for the European Union now. And we did that, we are doing all the dirty work, because for me the problem is the European Union. They don't accept the refugees. We're trying to be open with the refugees, our society is... I think that they welcome the refugees. Dignity. It's a great example, yes. And we have to be more realistic with the reality, we have to face the reality.

**Senior advisor of the Alternate Minister of Interior and Administrative
Reconstruction responsible for Migration Policy, June 2016**