



## EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

### **After Moria: Need for an Urgent Reform of the Common European Asylum System**

#### **Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is shocked about the news coming from the site of the former Moria refugee camp on Lesbos, Greece, which burnt down on 9 September 2020 leaving some 13,000 people without shelter. As a consequence, they had to camp in fields, olive groves, churches and even cemeteries<sup>1</sup>.

As we urged in March 2020<sup>2</sup>, refugees in the camp should have been included in the special measures to protect vulnerable groups from the coronavirus. However, those resulted in the mere isolation of Moria with no substantial improvement to the living conditions in the overcrowded camp. Just days before the fires, participants of a study tour to Lesbos organised by the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum<sup>3</sup> witnessed the horrendous sanitary situation on the spot, long queues for water and food, while humanitarian organisations working on Lesbos reported tensions between frustrated communities, as well as an increasing number of cases of sexual and gender-based violence.

At the beginning of September 2020, the first person in the camp was diagnosed with the COVID-19 infection. As of 8 September, the number of identified coronavirus cases reached 35. It is only a matter of time now when catastrophe would break out – with people dispersed on roads, not possessing means of individual protection and being unable to keep the social distancing rules.

We welcome that EU member states agreed to receive around 400 unaccompanied minors, while Germany is additionally taking in some 1,500 migrants (not only from Lesbos)<sup>4</sup>. Simultaneously, the Greek government promised to shelter up to 2,000 refugees on the ships at the Lesbos coast<sup>5</sup> and to build a new provisional camp for other 3,000 people. However, this is just a drop in the ocean: Far-reaching and long-term policies for the entire European Union are needed.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/sep/14/refugees-demand-rescue-from-lesbos-after-moria-camp-blaze](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/sep/14/refugees-demand-rescue-from-lesbos-after-moria-camp-blaze)

<sup>2</sup> See the Statement “Is It a Fortress Europe? A Call for a Humane Treatment of Refugees and Solidarity” of 18 March 2020 at <https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/StatementEURefugees18.03.2020.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See a follow-up article at <https://taz.de/Fluechtlingslager-auf-Lesbos-ausgebrannt/!5708028> (in German) and [https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Taz\\_Refugee-Camp-on-Lesbos-Burnt-Down-Moria%E2%80%99s-Last-Days\\_EN.pdf](https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Taz_Refugee-Camp-on-Lesbos-Burnt-Down-Moria%E2%80%99s-Last-Days_EN.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See [www.dw.com/en/germany-to-take-in-1500-more-migrants-from-greece/a-54930075](http://www.dw.com/en/germany-to-take-in-1500-more-migrants-from-greece/a-54930075)

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54094683](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54094683)

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum reiterates its call for the humane treatment of refugees and solidarity in the European Union. We call on the European Commission and EU member states to use a variety of means and tools to achieve this:

- to deliver immediate humanitarian aid to those suffering;
- to support the Greek authorities, including by boosting the capacity of personnel on the ground;
- but in first place, to enable a proportional re-location of the refugees to the EU member states.

We specifically address the European Commission with a request to bring back the topic of migration and asylum to the EU negotiating table and to foster a long-awaited reform of the Dublin III Regulation and the Common European Asylum System announced in 2016<sup>6</sup> – as a long-term response and solution to the current crisis.

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**The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum** was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 183 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.

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<sup>6</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants_en)