

Draft Speech of Ambassador Sjur Larsen

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Migration is a challenge for all of Europe, and all of Europe stands to benefit from an effective functioning of the Greek system for handling migration, both in terms of respect for human rights and protection of vulnerable groups, as well as in terms of border control, in accordance with its obligation as a member of Schengen.

Norway is an active and constructive partner in European cooperation in many areas. The Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement) is the most far-reaching agreement Norway has ever entered into - and is by far the single most important agreement regulating the relations between Norway and the EU. The EEA Agreement the Schengen agreement and others make Norway the most integrated non-member of EU! Through the EEA and Norway Grants, 1.79 billion euro contributes to the reduction of social and economic disparities in 15 countries in Europe for the period 2009 to 2014.

As you know, Norway, together with the other two EEA countries – Iceland and Lichtenstein – has developed a special program, the “Institutional Framework in the Asylum and Migration Sector”, designed specifically to assist Greece - the main entry point of irregular migration into Europe - face the particular challenges that derive from this situation.

Approximately 21 million euros, or one third of the total amount of €63.4 million available to Greece in the current funding period, is allocated to this purpose.

The National Action plan on Asylum and Migration Management sets out the framework for the actions of the Greek government in this field. The EEA donor states - together with the EU - support and contribute to the implementation of this plan.

One of the goals in this Action Plan is to establish more reception centres throughout the country.

As in many countries in Europe, also Norway has experienced the tensions creation of reception centers can entail. The Norwegian government is therefore working continuously with the challenges related to the establishment of new reception centres in local communities.

The experience in Norway is that an active participation by local administration, and close cooperation between the representatives from the state, the local authorities and the reception organization can break down some of the prejudices and lead to less tension in civil society.

We hope and believe our experiences may be valuable input for Greece when implementing the goals of the National Action Plan. In this seminar we have therefore gathered three of the main actors, in both countries, crucial in establishing reception centre;

- central authorities,
- local authorities and
- operators of reception centres .

In addition to being an arena for the exchange of information and best practices, I hope that the seminar will help build a network between the actors and pave the ground for possible twinning projects and activities.

I am looking forward to this seminar!