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**PRESS RELEASE**

**The Ombudsman's report on the EU Relocation programme for asylum seekers**

**The Greek Ombudsman published a report on the EU Relocation Programme for asylum seekers, on the occasion of the Regional Board of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) meeting in Athens on February 20, 2019. An assessment of the EU emergency measure of relocating asylum seekers from Greece to other Member-states was assigned to the Ombudsman by the IOI European Regional Board. Mr. Andreas Pottakis, participating in the Board, presented the report in their meeting in Brussels in October 2018 and also sent it to the Greek Minister for Migration, Dimitris Vitsas.**

The study compiled by the Independent Authority had the aim to approach the questions arising from the success levels of the Relocation programme, that officially ended on September 26, 2017, by looking into the relevant procedures and their outcome. The available data published by the Greek Asylum Service and the European Commission, both indicate that the Greek Authorities were remarkably effective in increasing their processing rate of applications for relocation in 2016. However, the Greek authorities were only met with a full response by the other Member-states in 2017.

The main conclusion of the study is that the structure of the relocation scheme predetermined its results by excluding all nationals from countries having a European refugee recognition rate of lower than 75%, as well as asylum seekers crossing the Greek sea borders after the entry into force of the EU-Turkey Joint Statement on March 20, 2016. The study raises the question of whether there is a cohesive political will in the EU to utilize the experience gained from the relocation programme in order to truly have a functional distribution measure of asylum seekers in the EU Member-states that is a permanent solidarity mechanism.

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