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PRESS RELEASE

Returns of third-country nationals – Special Report 2020

The Greek Ombudsman points out the disproportionate number of detained migrants in view of return, compare to the number of those returned in their countries of origin, a finding valid yet another year, in the independent authority's special report on Returns of third-country nationals in 2020.

The Report mentions the developments at the EU level and namely the New Pact on Migration and Asylum proposed by the European Commission, aiming -among others- at enhancing the effectiveness of returns and stressing the need for an independent monitoring mechanism of border procedures.

The Ombudsman refers to its experience from the cooperation with FRONTEX Complaints' Mechanism and stresses the importance of its initiative for networking with counterpart independent authorities in other member states to enhance transparency in European return operations (*the Nafplion Initiative*).

In the capacity of national mechanism for the external monitoring of returns of third-country nationals to their countries of origin, the Ombudsman notes its detailed observations, the negative as well as the positive ones, regarding the forced return operations, including readmission operations to Turkey taking place until march 2020, in which the Ombudsman's staff participated as monitors.

Last, finding that police detention cells in 2020 were not decongested in the peak of the pandemic and that alternative measures to detention were applied only by way of exception despite the provisions of the EU Return Directive, the Ombudsman reiterated the relevant recommendations he addressed in time to the competent authorities.

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