



## PRESS RELEASE

### **The structural problems of the hotspots on the Greek islands: Lessons learned for the EU's common asylum policy**

**For years, the refugee camps on the Greek islands have been overcrowded. Residents are subject to precarious and insecure living conditions and lack basic services. Contrary to the original expectations regarding these "hotspots" and the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, they have not led to swift asylum procedures and returns. The scientific staff of the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (SVR) has analysed the reasons for the ongoing problems. It recommends that national and European policymakers speed up asylum procedures, create integration prospects on the Greek mainland and systematically relocate refugees to other EU countries.**

**Berlin, 30 March 2021.** In 2015, the European Commission applied what is known as the "hotspot approach" to the Greek islands of Chios, Leros, Lesbos, Kos and Samos. Since then, the EU and its agencies have been supporting Greek authorities in registering and providing first reception services to asylum seekers arriving on the islands. In order to reduce irregular migration across the Aegean Sea, the EU-Turkey Statement was adopted five years ago, in March 2016. The Statement also changed the nature of the hotspots. Among other things, Turkey agreed to take back migrants arriving irregularly on the Greek islands. Further, for every Syrian returned, EU member states agreed to resettle another Syrian refugee from Turkey. In addition, Turkey received financial support from the EU to help provide for the refugee population it hosts.

Commenting on the policy brief "No more Morias? Origins, challenges and prospects of the hotspots on the Greek islands", published today by the SVR's scientific staff, Dr Jan Schneider, Head of Research Unit at the SVR, explains: "Since the EU-Turkey Statement, asylum seekers have been obliged to remain on the islands – not just for registration, but for the entire duration of their asylum procedure and, where applicable, until they are returned. As a result, the hotspots have been chronically overcrowded; at one point they housed around 38,000 people. However, the infrastructure is completely unsuitable and the resources are far from sufficient to guarantee adequate accommodation for so many people for an extended period of time. The hotspot system is dysfunctional, and the COVID-19 pandemic poses a particular threat."

The author of the policy brief, Karoline Popp, identifies two further factors underlying the situation in the hotspots, in addition to the EU-Turkey Statement and its direct and indirect effects on asylum procedures in Greece: "These two factors relate to structural challenges in the Greek political and administrative system on the one hand and to the deficiencies of the European asylum system on the other, especially the fact that there is no mechanism to redistribute refugees within Europe."

On 23 September 2020, the European Commission proposed a new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, in which border procedures play an important role. "Before further hotspot-like facilities are built at the EU's external borders, the EU should learn from the structural problems in Greece. National and European authorities have to expand capacities for initial reception and the implementation of asylum procedures, as well as creating mechanisms that reliably prevent overcrowding in the hotspots," says Schneider. "For example, they need to develop integration prospects for recognised refugees on the Greek mainland and systematically relocate asylum seekers and refugees to other EU countries. First of all, however, humanitarian relief in the hotspots should have top priority."

You can download the SVR policy brief "No more Morias?" here: <https://www.svr-migration.de/en/publications/hotspots>. The policy brief is available in English and German.



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### **About the Expert Council**

The Expert Council on Integration and Migration is an independent and interdisciplinary body providing research-based policy advice. Its reports aim to assist those bodies responsible for integration and migration policy, as well as the general public, in their opinion-forming processes. The interdisciplinary Expert Council comprises a total of nine Researchers: Prof. Dr Petra Bendel (Chairperson), Prof. Dr Daniel Thym (Deputy Chairperson), Prof. Dr Viola B. Georgi, Prof. Dr Marc Helbling, Prof. Dr Birgit Leyendecker, Prof. Dr Steffen Mau, Prof. Panu Poutvaara, Ph.D., Prof. Dr Sieglinde Rosenberger and Prof. Dr Hans Vorländer.

The organisation's scientific staff support the Expert Council in its work as well as conducting their own applied research in the fields of integration and migration using a variety of discipline-specific and methodological approaches. Research findings are published in the form of studies, expert reports and policy briefs.

For more information, go to: <https://www.svr-migration.de/en/>