

# HUMAN CARGO

**Arbitrary readmissions from the Italian  
sea ports to Greece**



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# CONTENT

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. METHODOLOGY	5
<b>2. RESEARCH FINDINGS</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1. THE READMISSION AGREEMENT	7
2.2. INFORMAL READMISSIONS	8
2.3. LACK OF LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AGAINST ARBITRARY REMOVALS	8
2.4. SERVICES PROVIDED BY ITALIAN NGOS INSIDE THE PORTS	9
2.5. DENIAL OF ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION	10
2.6. LACK OF PROTECTION FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINORS	12
2.7. ILL-TREATMENT	13
2.8. DETENTION CONDITIONS ON BOARD	13
2.9. BYPASSING THE DUBLIN PROCEDURE	13
2.10. VIOLATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-REFOULEMENT	14
<b>3. INDIVIDUAL CASES</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1. RETURNS UPON ARRIVAL AT “OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSING POINTS”: INFORMAL READMISSIONS	17
3.2. READMISSIONS OF ARRIVALS AT “UNOFFICIAL BORDER POINTS” IN CALABRIA AND LECCE	25
<b>4. BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>28</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of refugees and migrants hide in passenger ships, traveling in high-speed inflatable boats or in any other maritime transport, in an attempt, to cross the Adriatic Sea. These cross-border movements on this internal EU-border, in most of the cases, concern people in need of international protection, coming from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Eritrea, who upon arrival to the Italian ports, wish to lodge an asylum international protection application.<sup>1</sup> Among them, there are many unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups.

These people are trying to escape from Greece, their first European country of entry, which has been condemned by the European Court of Human rights (ECHtR) in the case of *MSS v Belgium and Greece*<sup>2</sup> as not being safe for people in need of international protection (among other reasons due to the lack of access to the asylum procedure<sup>3</sup>, lack of legal safeguards against *refoulement*, absent or insufficient reception conditions, inadequate, to say the least, welfare and integration policies).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, refugees and migrants have become the first victims of the profound financial and social crisis that struck Greece. At the same time, an unprecedented increase of racist violence is putting their lives daily, at risk.<sup>5</sup>

Inevitably, more people are desperately trying to leave Greece by any means through the Adriatic Sea, as well, attempts which consequently result in the loss of lives of an unknown number of irregular border crossers.<sup>6</sup> Only in the last week of June 2012 two Afghans died on their way to Ancona, two are in a coma and one is hospitalized with severe injuries when a group of refugees hidden inside a bus, suffered from the heat and lack of oxygen (23.06.12)<sup>7</sup>. Five days later a boat carrying 84 refugees reached the coast of Leuca in the province of Lecce (28.06.12). Eight of the boat people are still missing<sup>8</sup>.

**While official statistics indicate that a certain number of people are being readmitted annually from Italy to Greece, NGOs in Greece in their daily operations have registered a much greater number of people who have been readmitted from Italy.** Apparently, the research findings clearly indicate that in the majority, people in need of international protection and unaccompanied minors who are detected and apprehended in the Italian ports and in the southern coasts of Italy, are either refused entry to the Italian territory or are readmitted back to Greece<sup>9</sup>, without being granted any access to international protection, to any sort of registration of their claim, identification and individual evaluation of their case and/or vulnerability.

Italy on the one hand halts the return of people back to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation recognizing that Greece is not a safe country and

1 According to UNHCR 2008 written submissions: «In 2008, the proportion of asylum-seekers among boat arrivals was approximately 75% of whom some 50% were recognized as refugees or as needing another form of protection.”

2 M.S.S v Belgium and Greece (Application 30696/09).  
<http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?%22mdocnumber%22%3A%22880339%22%22itemid%22%3A%22001-103050%22%7D>

1. 3 See also: “Asylum campaign Report” <http://omadadikig-orwn.blogspot.gr/>

4 See also: Joint Submission of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the case of *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* (Application no. 30696/09). [www.ecre.org/index.php?option=com\\_downloads&id=566](http://www.ecre.org/index.php?option=com_downloads&id=566)

5 “I came here for peace” – The systematic ill-treatment  
of migrants and refugees by state agents in Patras. [http://www.  
proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/p\\_KAMPAGNEN/Flucht-ist-kein-Ver-  
brechen/Patras-Webversion04D-DS-k.pdf](http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/p_KAMPAGNEN/Flucht-ist-kein-Verbrechen/Patras-Webversion04D-DS-k.pdf), Racist incidents recorded  
in Greece.

<http://www.unhcr.gr/nea/artikel/aa6559226a5ce001775aa74c54a-30b7a/anisychitika-ta-apot.html>

For more info see also: Racist Violence Recording Network. <http://www.1againstracism.gr/index.php/el/component/k2/itemlist/category/25--->, "Walls of Shame" - Accounts from the inside. The detention centres of Evros / 11" [http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/q\\_PUBLIKATIONEN/2012/Evros-Bericht\\_12\\_04\\_10\\_BHP.pdf](http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/q_PUBLIKATIONEN/2012/Evros-Bericht_12_04_10_BHP.pdf),

GCR 2012: “Evros Region. Unaccompanied Minors in the Greek-Turkish Borders.” [http://www.gcr.gr/sites/default/files/evros\\_el.pdf](http://www.gcr.gr/sites/default/files/evros_el.pdf), Greek Council for Refugees, Press Release, *The Trial of the Policemen of the Ag. Panteleimon Police Station has been completed*, published on 20/12/2011. <http://www.gcr.gr/node/624>

6 For more about deaths in the mediterranean see: <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.gr/2006/02/nel-canale-di-sicilia.html>

7 <http://www.giornaledipuglia.com/2012/06/tragedia-sul-traghetto-per-ancona.html>

8 [http://bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/06/29/news/sbarco\\_nella\\_notte\\_nel\\_salento-38197648/](http://bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/06/29/news/sbarco_nella_notte_nel_salento-38197648/)

9 According to the Italian Ministry of Interior, Central Directorate of Immigration and Border Police during 2008 5,644 persons were returned to Greece from the Adriatic sea ports: 2,106 from the port of Ancona, 1,610 from the port of Venice, 1,198 from the port of Bari and 730 from the port of Brindisi. <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.gr/2006/01/patras-echr-declared-admissible-case-of.html>



complying with the MSS ruling. On the other hand by denying the registration of asylum claims on the border it disregards its obligations deriving from the Dublin II Regulation.

This practice violates directly the European Asylum Law: the principle of *non refoulement* (article 33 of the 1951 Geneva Convention); the prohibition to return someone in a country where he risks exposure to torture or other forms of degrading, inhuman or cruel treatment or punishment (article 3 ECHR); the prohibition of collective expulsion (article 4 of Protocol 4 ECHR) and the international obligation to protect unaccompanied minors.

Although Italy has been already condemned by the ECHR in the case of *Hirsi and others v Italy*<sup>10</sup> concerning the massive removals from Italy to Libya breaching article 4 of Protocol 4 ECHR (prohibition of collective expulsion of aliens), article 3 (risk of ill-treatment in Libya and in the country of origin) and article 3 in conjunction with 13 (violation of an effective remedy), it continues until today the practice of arbitrary removals in all of its sea borders.<sup>11</sup>

In light of *Sharifi and others v Greece and Italy*<sup>12</sup> case (lodged on 25.3.2009), pending before the ECtHR Grand Chamber, concerning a group of people in need of international protection readmitted back

to Greece, where they faced further risk of being readmitted back to Turkey (chain readmission), this report aims to highlight the systematic character of the ongoing arbitrary massive readmissions from Italy to Greece, as well as the procedure followed by the Italian authorities upon apprehension.

## 1.1. Methodology

Pro Asyl<sup>13</sup> in co-operation with the Greek Council for Refugees, conducted a research at the Italian ports<sup>14</sup> of Venice, Ancona, Bari, Brindisi as well as at the port of Patras during April (2.4-5.4) and May (11.5-15.5), 2012. During these missions, the research team (the team) visited Patras, the main Greek port of departure and all four main Italian ports of destination in the Adriatic Sea for those trying to seek international protection outside Greece. Additionally and with the aim of meeting people who may have been subjected to the Greek-Italian Readmission Agreement, the team visited various sites, where undocumented migrants and asylum seekers temporarily reside in both countries<sup>15</sup>.

We talked with more than 50 persons in Athens and Patras who reportedly had been at least once readmitted back to Greece. As the stories we heard had numerous common elements, we will report a sample of the interviews conducted considering that they clearly delineate the procedures followed by the Italian authorities in all of its ports (official and unofficial border crossing points). Interviews were conducted in the following languages: Dari, Arabic, English, French and Italian.

The team also, held meetings with the Greek authorities<sup>16</sup>, NGOs' staff and other social actors

10 *Hirsi and others v Italy* <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-109231>

11 <http://sim.law.uu.nl/sim/caselaw/Hof.nsf/233813e697620022c1256864005232b7/2b3b4d6a38269c0cc12579a70032afd8?OpenDocument>

12 The submission contains 27 cases, which occurred between April 2008 and September 2009. The list is based on the testimony of affected individuals (interviews conducted by UNHCR at border areas and in detention facilities), and on reports from UNHCR partners, including non-governmental organizations. In all cases, the persons were later located, either in their countries of origin after onward removal from Turkey; in Greece, after a new attempt to reach the European Union; or in Turkey. In one case, the individuals were asylum-seekers whose claims were not registered in Greece despite intervention by UNHCR and other agencies. Asylum-seekers and people who may be in need of international protection have been returned to Greece without being informed adequately about their right to seek asylum in Italy, and without being afforded the possibility to lodge an asylum application. Among these problematic cases, UNHCR is aware of cases of removal in which deportation orders have been issued to unaccompanied minors without any assessment of their needs, nor examination or referrals to competent authorities of requests for international protection. In UNHCR's view, such practice is contrary to the principle of the best interest of the child, which should be a primary consideration in all actions regarding children. UNHCR Written Submission <http://www.unhcr.org/4deccee39.pdf>

13 The team consisted of two lawyers (Tzeferakou and Tsapopoulou, a social anthropologist and Farsi interpreter (Stroux), as well as an interpreter for Arabic

14 The lawyer of the team Tsapopoulou visited the Italian ports of Venice (16-18.4), Ancona (22.4-24.4), Bari (24.4-26.4 & 28.4) and Brindisi (27.4).

15 The lawyer of the team Tsapopoulou visited the following places and conducted interviews with holders of international protection in Italy, asylum seekers, members of Solidarity Groups and NGOs, accommodation shelters and provisional places in the following cities: Rome, Venice, Ancona, Bari, Brindisi. In Patras we met interviewees in their makeshift shelters. In Athens we visited places where readmitted persons meet and held interviews in the premises of GCR

16 An official meeting was held with the Ministry of Citizen Protection (11.6.2012) and an unofficial with the port authorities in

such as solidarity groups working with migrants and refugees both in Italy<sup>17</sup> and in Greece<sup>18</sup> and people who have managed to reach Italy and have not be returned back to Greece<sup>19</sup>, in order to exchange information and confirm the findings collected to that point and evaluate the changes that might have occurred over the past years regarding the relevant practices followed both by the Greek and Italian authorities on the sea border.

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Patras (15.5.2012)

17 In Rome (5.4.2012) we visited the Centro Astalli whose employee follows up one of the two Afghans readmitted back to Italy from Greece and met with many activists in the field of refugees' rights, in Venice we met with researchers in the field of human rights and interviewed Afghan refugees. We also met with COGES an Italian NGO which is implementing a project at the Port of Venice concerning legal counseling and cultural mediation at the Italian port (17-18.4) as well as with the workers of the Centro Boa in Tesserà Venice (18.4) ran by the same NGO. In Ancona we met with members of the "Ambasciata dei Diritti", (23.4) and we visited the GUS NGO (24.4) implementing partner of a project offering legal counselling to asylum seekers and refugees in the port of Ancona. In Bari we interviewed activists supporting migrants' and refugees' rights (25.4). We also met with a worker of the Rete Iside, the NGO working in the premises of Bari's port, offering legal counseling also to those arriving from Greece (26.4). In Brindisi (27.4) we talked with persons who have managed to stay in Italy and visited a shelter run by Caritas where people from the South of Italy (Emergenza Nord Africa) are staying. On April 28.4, on our way back to Greece, we interviewed truck drivers on board of the ship about the controls on the Greek and Italian ports, the scanners in the Italian ports, the procedure followed and who all expressed to us their preoccupation about the radiation to which they are exposed and the one-sided strict controls (upon arrival at the Italian ports, but not upon return).

18 In Patras we met with the employees of UNHCR (11.05.12), Praksis (13.05.12) and Red Cross (11.05.12 and 13.05.12).

19 In Rome (6.4-12.4) we interviewed J., H., A., R., H., all of them Afghan refugees who have been living in Italy from 3 to 10 years (practically, since the Bilateral Readmission Agreement was put into force), in Venice we talked with (16.4-18.4) Q., A., Y. Afghan refugees who have also reached the Italian port city of Venice under trucks from 7 to 4 years ago, in Bari we had a thorough discussion with M. who has been staying in Italy for some months, but had been also readmitted back to Greece four years ago (25.4) and in Brindisi (27.4.2012) we interviewed Q. who had arrived in the city port of Brindisi as an unaccompanied minor 5 years ago. Interviews were held in Italian and all of them have also explained to us their previous readmission experiences and their voyage through the Italian asylum system once they finally managed to stay.

## 2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 2.1. The Readmission Agreement

The 1999 Readmission Agreement between Italy and Greece stipulates that third country nationals who have already crossed or stayed in the territory of one signatory State and attempt to reach the territory of the other state without meeting the requirements for regular entry, are to be readmitted by the first state “*upon request of the second State and without any formalities*” (article 5 of the Readmission Agreement). According to the Readmission Agreement and its relevant protocol the readmission takes place following the acceptance of the second state. If the readmission request is approved by the Greek authorities, a reply has to be sent without any delay and in any case, within 48 hours from the reception of the request (see Executive Protocol of the bilateral Readmission Agreement, paragraph 1.4). The readmission must take place within 15 days (see paragraph 2.5 of the Executive Protocol). The responsible authorities for the readmission procedure are the Italian local authorities of the Immigration and Border police of the Department of the Internal Security of the Ministry of Interior and the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection and Public Order.

As it has been agreed between the Italian and the Greek government the airport of Athens and the port of Patras are the official readmission points. In practice persons readmitted under this procedure, are usually sent to Patras. Upon arrival they are transferred to the Police Directorate of the city. Following a registration procedure where they receive a new return order, they are released.<sup>20</sup>

It seems, that the people apprehended in **any unofficial border point (like Calabria) or in the rest of the Italian territory** (if proven at least by their own words that they arrived to Italy through Greece within the time limit regulated by the Readmission Agreement), are to be readmitted

after the approval of the readmission request by the Greek authorities (see: chapter 3.2.). Contrary to this practice, persons who are apprehended in **official border points** – such as the port of either Ancona, Bari, Brindisi or Venice – are readmitted back to Greece in an informal way (see: chapter 3.1.).

The Readmission Agreement contains a number of theoretical safeguards. Article 6 provides for its non-applicability *inter alia* to those recognized by the requesting states as refugees under the 1951 Geneva Convention or as stateless persons under the 1954 Convention in relation to the status of stateless persons. Article 18 foresees that the risk of chain-refoulement should be taken into account and that the readmission can be denied if in the state of destination or in another state, to which he or she could be later transferred is at risk of inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment, death penalty or his life can be in danger because of his race, nationality, specific social group membership, political opinion. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of article 23, contain a clause according to which the provisions of the Readmission Agreement should not prejudice the application of the 1951 Geneva Convention or other international human rights instruments binding its signatories. The Readmission Agreement excludes those third country nationals “to whom the Dublin Convention of 15 June 1990 is applicable”. However, as described below, these safeguards remain theoretical. In practice they are neither applied nor taken into consideration.

Even though the Readmission Agreement is bilateral and should therefore be applied by both counterparts. Our findings indicate that the readmissions taking place are one-sided and carried out only from Italy to Greece. Considering also the bilateral Readmission Protocol between Greece and Turkey and its actual implementation, where in many cases those accepted upon request by the Turkish authorities are then returned back to Greece due to wrong registration of age, nationality, asylum seekers, vulnerable groups. One can argue that Greece could also apply the

<sup>20</sup> The deportation order issued in case of a “formal re-admission” procedure, upon request to the Greek government is called Decision of Return of the Police Director of Achaia. To those readmitted by giving custody to the captain, no such paper is issued.

Readmission Agreement in case - if not abstain from its applicability at all by denouncing it - of readmission of certain vulnerable groups of people.<sup>21</sup>

During 2011-2012 only two persons were readmitted from Greece back to Italy<sup>22</sup> and according to the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection and Public Order, in total four readmissions have been completed since its enactment.

Considering the infringements and the lack of safeguards as presented in this report and the current situation in Greece, the utility of such readmissions in the internal European borders is to be questioned as, on a secondarily level, its unilateral applicability.

## 2.2. Informal Readmissions

In the majority of the cases we interviewed, the people are apprehended **inside the ship** or upon arrival **inside the Italian ports**. In these cases the immediate readmissions to Greece are executed by the Italian border officials simply by giving custody of the persons to the captain of the ship. The captain countersigns a basic form with the individual's name, nationality and sometimes date of birth, without following even the limited formalities provided in the Readmission Agreement.<sup>23</sup> Allegedly many times the authorities do not record even the

name, surname and nationality of the people to be readmitted by ship. This procedure is very speedy and excludes even the limited formalities provided in the Readmission Agreement<sup>24</sup> and the basic legal safeguards against *refoulement*. (See: chapter 3.1.)

In such cases the appointed by the Readmission Agreement as the Greek responsible authority, Ministry of Citizen Protection and Public Order, keeps no record of these readmissions, as no official request is made by the Italian authorities and no confirmation of the request by the above mentioned Greek authorities is required. Therefore, official data from the Ministry of Citizens Protection and Public Order does not include statistics on this type of *informal readmissions*. Apparently this practice in essence legitimizes informal readmissions as there is no official record of them by the competent authority. The only statistics provided for are held by the port authorities of Patras and Igoumenitsa (as well as Corfu and Corinth in some cases). The persons readmitted from the Italian ports with this procedure are returned to the above-mentioned ports of embarkation.

## 2.3. Lack of legal safeguards against arbitrary removals

Almost all of the interviewees told us that no information about the procedure followed, their legal status, their rights, any possible legal remedy, the reason for which some of them have been fingerprinted was provided to them by the Italian authorities in written or oral form. In a language that they could understand. In most of the cases, reportedly there was no interpreter during the removal procedure.

No decision or any removal order was reportedly ever given to any of them. Even in the cases of readmissions from the southern coasts of Italy, where people were detained for almost two weeks, no decision or any information leaflet was handed to them.

21 See: Pro Asyl in co-operation with GCR and Infomobile 2012: Walls of Shame. Accounts from the Inside: The Detention Centres of Evros. p 14-20. [http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/q\\_PUBLIKATIONEN/2012/Evros-Bericht\\_12\\_04\\_10\\_BHP.pdf](http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/q_PUBLIKATIONEN/2012/Evros-Bericht_12_04_10_BHP.pdf)

22 Q.T (23) and V.S (23), are both from Afghanistan and holders of international protection in Italy. They were readmitted back to Italy from Greece on April 12, 2012 (Decision of Acceptance of their readmission from the Italian authorities, Protocol Number 400/C/2010/I.6/\*\*\*\*\*). One of the team's lawyer handled the cases and flew to Italy in order to assist them upon their return and to assess the applicability of the readmission agreement from the Italian counterparts. These two cases make clear that apart from the one-sided application of the Readmission Agreement, the bureaucratic obstacles and the denial of the Italian authorities to facilitate the return of the two Afghans to Italy - their country of legal residence and the state officially offering protection to them - the Readmission Agreement is only used as an instrument to deny access to the territory and to prevail the respect and application of it, rather than complying with its national, european and international obligations.

23 See: Written Submission by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Case of *Sharifi and others v Italy and Greece* (Application No. 16643/09). <http://www.unhcr.org/4deccee39.pdf>

24 *ibid*, 3.3.2



In some cases, we were told that the persons signed some papers without being aware of the content.

In almost all of the cases the readmitted persons could not contact a lawyer, an NGO staff or any one else. Even in cases where the readmitted persons told the authorities that they have family members legally residing in Italy, they were not allowed to contact them.

The registration procedure takes place without any formalities and legal guarantees. In some cases, the interviewees told us that the police did not even write down their names. There is no provision for legal remedies challenging the wrong registration of names and ages.

No identification procedure is followed for identifying those in need of international protection, other vulnerable cases or people in need of medical assistance. Before the removal no individual assessment of each case takes place by the authorities. In many cases the removals were collective.

The apprehended were not allowed to express to the authorities the reason why they should not be readmitted. All of the persons interviewed, have told us that they could not challenge their removal and that they had no access to a legal remedy against *refoulement*.

## 2.4. Services provided by Italian NGOs inside the ports

In the Italian ports, NGOs provide “assistance services, legal information and orientation for asylum seekers”. As we were told by NGO staff, they do not have free access to the terminals in the ports, nor do they always receive information concerning all arrivals. Only when the police decide to utilize their services then they are allowed to contact the apprehended persons.<sup>25</sup> It remains unclear on which criteria the authorities ask for

their assistance.

All persons we interviewed, except for one case of a minor, told us, that they had no contact with a NGO staff, such as lawyers or social workers. Furthermore, none of the apprehended persons had any possibility to contact them by themselves, ask them for support or receive any oral and/or written information.

According to the NGOs, sometimes interpreters are allowed to accompany the officers and provide their services to the authorities without the presence of other NGO staff. In other times they are allowed to interpret via telephone. Even when NGO staff is allowed to be present during the procedure, its speediness and the lack of privacy do not guarantee the confidentiality and the effectiveness of the provided services. During collective apprehensions further time limitations worsen the quality of the provided services, when available. Under these circumstances the NGOs cannot really provide legal aid.

In Ancona the offices of “GUS”, the organization providing assistance, are situated in the premises of the port. The office of the NGO is open until 5pm, but the ships nowadays arrive with a delay of one to two hours as they have reduced their speed in order to save fuel. If migrants are found on board out of working hours, and in case the authorities inform the organisation about the arrival, the staff either returns to the port, goes to the police station upon phone call or provides tele-interpretation services. Additionally, we noticed while visiting the NGO offices during normal working hours, a paper stating that the NGO “does not follow files for family reunion except in special issues”.

In Bari the organization offering legal counseling in the port is called “Rete Iside”. Its office is situated far away from the pier where ships from Greece arrive. According to the staff, their intervention is limited, since it depends on the police whether or not they will be asked to offer counseling and interpretation services.

In Venice the responsible support organization is “Coges”<sup>26</sup>. Despite the fact that the organization

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25 About Venice, see: <http://www.meltingpot.org/IMG/pdf/RelazioneRespingimentiVenezia.pdf>

26 Venezia – Lettera alla Coges: fuori dal porto o dentro solo

started providing its services in January 2012, the signs at the entrance of the office building still announces the Italian Refugee Council (CIR), the former organization working in the port. Coges provides for a project supervisor, an interpreter and a young volunteer who joins them. The interpreter reportedly speaks Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Farsi.

## 2.5. Denial of access to international protection

No one of those readmitted ever had a realistic chance to have his request for asylum registered or to express his fear about *refoulement*.

The Italian authorities seem to prevent people from applying for international protection in Italy. Allegedly, in most of the cases they were not asked any questions, not even their names, while others explicitly told the police that they want to apply for asylum, but the authorities didn't register

their claim. In one case, the police explained, that according to a "new rule" it was not possible to ask for asylum anymore.

Some persons told us that they had been misled by the Italian authorities. For instance officers allegedly asked them: "Where do you want to go? Sweden? Norway?" "Do you want to travel to Belgium?" "No, you want to go to Germany or else!" In another case the police allegedly told the apprehended, that they would be transferred to a camp but instead they were returned to the ship and readmitted. Allegedly, nobody was ever asked why he left his country of origin or Greece or if he was an asylum seeker in Greece. Even when people told them that they had requested asylum in Greece this was not taken into consideration.

Also two families, who reported to the Italian authorities that they have family members legally residing in other EU-countries, were not informed about the possibility to apply for asylum in Italy, thus, their right to family reunification under Dublin II. They were just readmitted back to Greece. GCR was contacted via mail by GUS organization, which requested support for the readmitted families in order to start the procedure of family reunification in Greece.

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cambiando il sistema dei respingimenti (Venice, 3.2.12) <http://migromigra.apg23.org/2012/02/06/venezia-lettera-alla-coges-fuori-dal-porto-o-dentro-solo-cambiando-il-sistema-dei-respingimenti/>



Control of trucks in the port of Ancona

## Witnessing a readmission in the port of Venice

On April 18, 2012 while on a research visit in Italy, a researcher of the team was invited by the port authorities to observe the readmission procedure of two apprehended Afghans on board of an ANEK Lines ship, which had arrived at 11pm.

We went to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the ship, together with the Iraqi interpreter of Coges organization, who reportedly provides interpretation in Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish and Farsi. The two Afghans were brought into the saloon. They seemed exhausted and frightened. One of them appeared to have a broken nose. After a body search of the apprehended, the police officers via the interpreter asked the apprehended questions about their personal data. At some point the interpreter continued asking questions. The police did not ask any further questions and nobody wrote down the questions or the supposed answers of the interpreter and the two apprehended. In the case of the first Afghan, the interpreter told the police, that he grew up in Iran, where the rest of his family lives without facing any problem with the authorities and that he wants to go to Belgium as he has an uncle there. Concerning the second Afghan, the interpreter explained to the officers in Italian, that due to his accent he doubts if the young man grew up in Afghanistan. The interpreter went on telling, that this Afghan also wants to go to Belgium in order to work for three months and

then return home to Afghanistan.

Some minutes later the Afghans signed a paper, which was in Italian without any further interpretation and explanation of its content or its legal consequences and without providing them with a copy. This paper included only the basic personal data and no further information regarding their cases. As the researcher was told, a copy would be handed at a later time to the captain of the ship.

When the procedure was concluded and the two Afghans were taken away to the provisional detention room, one of the officers commented to the researcher, that they didn't want to ask for asylum in Italy and that there was nothing else the police could do.

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*Apparently, the whole procedure lacked any legal safeguards, no information was provided to the apprehended ones regarding the asylum and the readmission procedure and no formal identification procedure was followed. The police didn't really assess their specific needs, nor are they the competent authorities to do so. Furthermore, they arbitrarily concluded that the Afghans didn't want to apply for asylum. Finally, the Afghans were not informed about their readmission (Fieldnotes, 18.4.12)*



## 2.6. The Lack of protection for unaccompanied minors

According to Praksis, a Greek NGO running a program concerning minors in the port of Patras, from September 2011 until today (June 2012) they were contacted by the Greek port authorities in 19 cases of readmitted unaccompanied minors.

In general, most of the returned unaccompanied minors are Afghans. According to what most of the interviewees stated, the Italian authorities usually estimate the age of those arriving at the Italian ports by “looking at the person”. We have been told repeatedly of minor cases being registered as adults. In one case, we were informed about a 10–years old minor, who was readmitted from Bari to Patras in November 2011, registered by the Italian authorities as an 18 years old!

In some other cases allegedly, even when the children clearly said that they were minors, they were not registered as such. It seems as if the age determination depends exclusively on the discretion of the Italian authorities. In another case, a minor allegedly showed his documents from Greece proofing his age and the Italian officers tore it up. Others told us, that they were not even asked about their age by the authorities.

An unaccompanied minor who had been readmitted once in the past described that on his second attempt he arrived at the port of Venice, and was ‘lucky’ this time, since he was severely injured upon his arrival by a truck which drove over him. He assumes that due to his injuries and his consequent stay in a hospital, he was not readmitted at that time.<sup>27</sup>

In those rare cases, minors reported that they were transferred to the hospital for medical examination, a wrist X-ray was also taken.<sup>28</sup> Children

are not properly informed about the exams they undergo or the procedure. Furthermore they were not informed about the result of the medical examinations they underwent, the considerable margin of error was not evaluated and they do not have the chance to challenge such a decision. One of the minors interviewed, clearly told us that although he saw that the age written down on his paper in the hospital by the doctor, stated that he is 16 years old, he was readmitted back to Greece.

There have also been documented cases of minors separated from their family by the readmission procedure. In one case, two alleged minor brothers were separated. One was readmitted as an adult and the other stayed in Italy. In another case a minor who managed to reach Italy informed the authorities about his brother who is legally residing in Italy, but was not allowed to contact him. In some other cases of interviewed unaccompanied minors, even though they informed the Italian authorities that their families are residing in other European countries, no measures to locate their families or relatives were initiated.

Concerns also arise about health risks resulting from the use of scanners for the detection of irregular migrants hiding in trucks especially in the cases of minors.<sup>29 30</sup>

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that it is “unjustified” to undertake a radiograph examination for age estimation purposes on alleged minor refugees. It is not acceptable to expose children to ionizing radiation for an examination, which has no therapeutic benefit and is purely for administrative purposes.

<sup>29</sup> Italy has installed 28 networked X-ray scanners located at its major national ports of which the ones in Ancona, Bari, Brindisi and Venice are all of the type “Silhouette 300”. These scanners are dual-energy x-ray devices up to 450 keV operating in continuous exposure mode - fluoroscopic mode (also known as Silhouette Mobile Scanner). The same types of images are produced with gamma ray scanning technology operating in the same manner. These scanners are deployed to inspect interior of vehicles crossing the border. <http://www.donggok.co.kr/data/SilhouetteScan.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> In France using x-rays to find people is banned in case the radiation damages their health, even though it emits X-ray levels similar to a hospital machine. See: French ban X-ray scans for illegal immigrants as radiation makes them ‘too dangerous’ Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1278565/French-ban-X-ray-scans-illegal-immigrants-radiation-makes-dangerous.html#ixzz1xOgWgJlJ>, See also: Health dangers by x-rays <http://www.pnas.org/content/83/13/4839.abstract>

<sup>27</sup> Field-notes: April 17 and April 18, 2012

<sup>28</sup> The use of X-rays and other methods that expose minors to useless and dangerous radiation is highly problematic from a legal and a medical point of view. Concerning the health risks of radiation the Royal College of Radiologists in London in 1996 stated,



## 2.7. Ill-treatment

Many persons who arrived at the port of Ancona and were later on interviewed by the team, reported that they had been ill-treated by the Italian authorities during the readmission procedure. Among the alleged victims of violence, there were also unaccompanied minors. They described being pulled by the officers, slapped, punched and kicked in the police station where they were taken in order to be fingerprinted, on their way back to the ship and/or inside the provisional detention places of the ship.

One unaccompanied minor told us, that the Italian authorities on board of the ship beat him, then forced him to run in circles around himself and finally ordered him to take off his clothes. Then the officers pulled his boxer shorts up to his belly and forced him to run in circles around himself again.

## 2.8. Detention conditions on board

In almost all of the cases, the ship companies provide for a cabin used as a temporary detention cell for those to be readmitted. In other cases people are kept in metal storage rooms, subjected to extreme weather conditions during winter and summer. These rooms were described to us as dirty and inappropriate. On one ship, where those apprehended are kept in a storage room of the garage, an NGO member confirmed to us that this place is so filthy that you cannot even approach it. The readmitted persons are not always offered food and water or have access to the toilet. In most of the cases, they were given a sandwich and a bottle of water. In some rare cases orange juice was given to them. When detained in a ship cabin, they usually have to drink water from the toilet. Sometimes they had to urinate in plastic bottles. In one case, while waiting to be deported, they were locked up on board for more than two days before the ship's departure, without being able to contact anyone (no lawyers, no NGOs, etc) during that time.

## 2.9. Bypassing the Dublin Procedure

Dublin II obliges the responsible Member State to “examine the application of any third country national who applies at the border or in their territory” following the determination of responsibility through application of the Regulation's criteria.

According to the ECtHR (Grand Chamber) ruling *MSS v. Greece and Belgium*, **every state member is obliged to verify if the country of return complies, in practice, with its obligations in asylum matters.**<sup>31</sup>

Belgium was convicted by ECtHR for violation of article 3 and 13 (return to a country which lacks of an effective asylum system in practice), article 3 (exposure to degrading detention and living conditions) and article 3 (lack of an effective remedy against arbitrary removal) in the case of an Afghan asylum seeker, who was returned by the Belgian authorities back to Greece.

In *Nsv. SSHD and ME v. ORAC* the CJEU held that the Member States could not transfer individuals to another EU Member State, where the asylum seeker could face violation of the article 4 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (prohibition of torture).<sup>32</sup> It noted, that the member states cannot be “unaware” of the systemic deficiencies in the asylum procedure and the reception conditions in Greece and thus Ireland and UK are obliged not to return asylum seekers in Greece, but examine their claims.

After the above-mentioned decisions a number of member states - among them Italy - halted returning asylum seekers to Greece.

According to official statistics provided by the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection and Public

<sup>31</sup> *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece*, Application no. 30696/09, Council of Europe: European Court of Human Rights, 21 January 2011, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4d39bc7f2.html>

<sup>32</sup> In *Nsv. SSHD and ME v. ORAC* the CJEU <http://www.airecentre.org/news.php/35/press-release-n.s.-v-secretary-of-state-for-the-home-department-case-c-41110-and-m.e.-others-v-orac->

Order, no return under Dublin II took place from Italy to Greece during 2011. There have been ten initial requests throughout this year, none of them completed though from the Italian counterparts.

On the other hand readmissions – both formal and informal – go on systematically under the above-described conditions rejecting people at the frontier without allowing them to apply for international protection or denying the registration of their claims. **It seems that the Italian authorities use this practice for bypassing the Dublin II procedure and in this way they avoid the clear obligations deriving from it.**

## 2.10. Violation of the principle of non-refoulement

The Italian authorities do not properly examine whether the readmission exposes the affected persons to a risk of direct or indirect *refoulement* to a country *where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion* (article 33 of Geneva Convention, article 78 TFEU, article 21 of the Qualification Directive, article 18 European Charter of Fundamental Rights), where they would be subjected to the death penalty, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (article 3 ECHR, article 19 of the European Charter of Fundamental rights) or where they can face torture or ill-treatment (indirect or direct *refoulement*). Additionally, the Italian authorities in cases of unaccompanied minors don't take into consideration the best interest of the child, nor do they comply with their international and European obligations as regards the protection of the children. (Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Many of the readmitted persons, were entitled *prima facie* to international protection. Some of them have had visible signs of torture or belonged to other vulnerable groups.

**Upon readmission to Greece, people face the risk of onward *refoulement* to their country of origin, where their life, freedom and dignity are in danger.** The systematic inefficiencies of the asylum

and deportation procedure are well documented and known in all European countries.

More specifically, those readmitted to Igoumenitsa, were detained under degrading and inhuman conditions<sup>33</sup> pending deportation and faced the risk of being removed back to their country of origin. During detention, they were transferred to different detention centres or borderguard and police stations, without having access to the asylum procedure and to an effective remedy against arbitrary removal.

In two of the below described cases, minors were readmitted to Igoumenitsa and were detained for 20 days in a mixed detention facility at the port, until they were then transferred to a special reception centre for unaccompanied minors in Konitsa. One of them described having suffered a lot because of the detention conditions. He told us out of desperation he allegedly even started a hunger strike to struggle for his freedom.

The majority of those readmitted back to Patras seem to be released immediately or after some days and are given a "Return Decision". They are ordered to voluntarily leave from Greece within a short period of time and are exposed to further and repeated arrests, detention and removal in the future.

During their stay in Greece the readmitted cannot have real access to the asylum procedure<sup>34</sup>, have to face the extremely dysfunctional asylum procedure and cannot be protected against arbitrary removals to their country of origin<sup>35</sup>.

33 Hellenic League for Human Rights (in French) 2010: <http://184.107.130.30/files/Rapport%20conditions%20de%20survie.pdf>

34 See among others: "Asylum campaign Report" (forthcoming in July 2012). <http://omadadikigorwn.blogspot.gr/> Joint Submission of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the case of *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* (Application no. 30696/09). [www.ecre.org/index.php?option=com\\_downloads&id=566](http://www.ecre.org/index.php?option=com_downloads&id=566), "Walls of Shame" Accounts from the inside. The detention centres of Evros [http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/q\\_PUBLIKATIONEN/2012/Evros-Bericht\\_12\\_04\\_10\\_BHP.pdf](http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/q_PUBLIKATIONEN/2012/Evros-Bericht_12_04_10_BHP.pdf), AITIMA, Press Release, [Serious Disruptions in Asylum Procedures in Petrou Ralli], published 15/03/2012. [http://www.aitima.gr/aitima\\_files/Deltio\\_Typoy\\_Prosvasi\\_sti\\_diadikasia\\_asyloy.pdf](http://www.aitima.gr/aitima_files/Deltio_Typoy_Prosvasi_sti_diadikasia_asyloy.pdf), Greek Council for Refugees, Press Release, What is happening in Petrou Ralli?, published 19/03/2012. <http://www.gcr.gr/node/651>, Greek Ombudsman, Independent Authority, Press Release, 08/02/2012, *Asylum Procedure: Problems worsen as the new asylum service is not functional yet*. <http://www.synigoros.gr/resources/20120131-dt-asylo--aytoia-evroy-final-2.pdf>

35 *MSS v. Belgium and Greece*, paragraph 299-322



Furthermore, **upon their readmission to Greece they risk being subjected to degrading living and/or detention conditions.**

The lack of reception conditions in Greece (the absence or insufficient housing or humanitarian assistance, the inadequate welfare and integration policies<sup>36</sup>) are also well known in all EU countries.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, refugees are the scapegoats and the first victims of the profound financial and social crisis that struck Greece. They become also victims of racist speech, even officially adopted by the Ministry of Citizen Protection and Public Order and the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity<sup>38</sup>

36 Joint Submission of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the case of *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* (Application no. 30696/09). [www.ecre.org/index.php?option=com\\_downloads&id=566](http://www.ecre.org/index.php?option=com_downloads&id=566)

37 See: *M.S.S. v Belgium and Greece*, op cit, para.263. Greek Council for Refugees, *Annual Report 2011*, published on 03/04/2012: p. 7. <http://www.gcr.gr/sites/default/files/Ekthesi%20Pepragmenwn.pdf>, Greek Council for Refugees, *The asylum situation in Greece in 11 points*, published in Greek on 25/11/2011. <http://www.gcr.gr/node/618>, point 4.

38 Concerning the recent statements by the ex- minister of Health and Social Solidarity, see also: <http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/sti-boyli-i-tropologia-gia-tin-ygeionomiki-eksetasi-ton-metanaston>, <http://aristotelous17.wordpress.com/2012/05/10/%CE%AD%CE%B E%CF%89-%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%BE%CE%AD%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CF%84%CF%8E%CF%81%CE%B1-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9-%CE%BC%CE%B5-%CE%B5%CE%B3%CE%BA%CF%8D%CE%BA%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CF%85/>

in various occasions, but also direct victims of an unprecedented brutal racist violence incited by extreme right wing street gangs<sup>39</sup>.

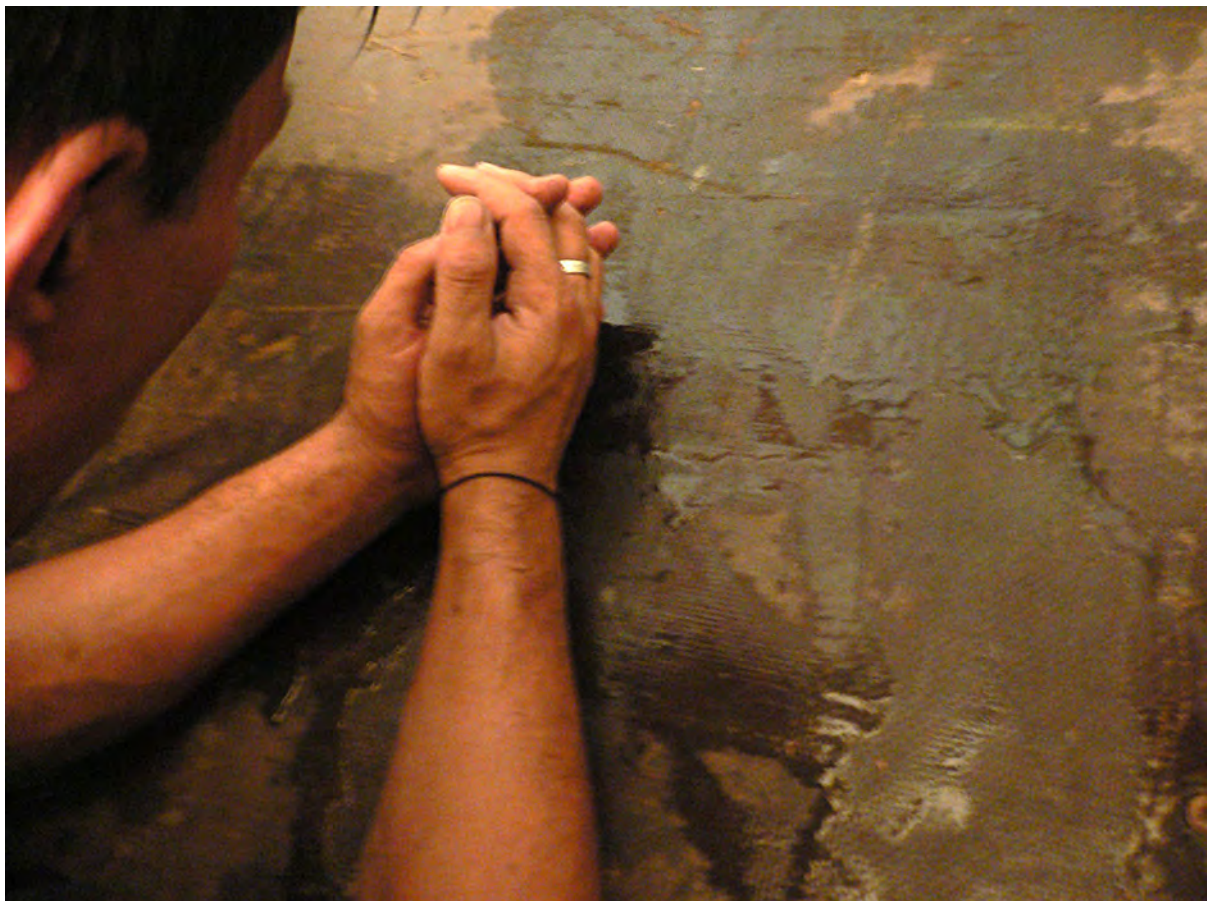
Almost all readmitted people we met, were homeless before and after their readmission to Greece. They had no access to food, water, sanitary infrastructure or to medical care. Some of them were also victims of racist or/and police violence in Patras or Athens.<sup>40</sup>

Many of them have been living for many years under these conditions and are reportedly suffering mental health problems. No perspective for an improvement of their social conditions is foreseen.

It is clear that readmissions from Italy to Greece constitute a direct or indirect violation of the international obligations of Italy, such as the obligation of non-refoulement or the protection against torture or other forms of inhuman, degrading or cruel punishment or treatment.

39 See footnote 5

40 "I came here for peace" – The systematic ill-treatment of migrants and refugees by state agents in Patras. [http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/p\\_KAMPAGNEN/Flucht-ist-kein-Verbrechen/Patras-Webversion04D-DS-k.pdf](http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/p_KAMPAGNEN/Flucht-ist-kein-Verbrechen/Patras-Webversion04D-DS-k.pdf),



Hiding inside a truck under unbearable heat





Readmission of unaccompanied minor



Lack of access to toilettes during readmission forces the people affected to urinate into bottles



# 3. INDIVIDUAL CASES

## 3.1. Returns upon arrival at “official borderpoints”: Informal Readmissions

The Italian ports of Ancona, Bari, Brindisi and Venice are highly militarized border crossing areas, enclosed by fences. In most of them, access to specific areas of the port is only granted to those who hold a valid ticket and who wish to travel. In Ancona, due to the port's structure one can easily watch the disembarkation and embarkation procedure from outside the fences. In the other ports, these procedures take place at a distance, “safe” from any prying eyes.

Strict controls of vehicles and passengers onboard of the ships and upon disembarkation are enhanced in some cases with thorough scanning methods. Even if someone manages to come out of the truck where he's been hiding for hours (in some cases even for days), it is quite impossible that he will manage to leave the port area, that he'll be able in case of apprehension to ask for international protection and have his claim be registered and properly assessed.

### 3.1.1. Ancona

**M.J. (17), from Afghanistan<sup>41</sup> / Ancona - Patras**

*While we are sitting on the rails next to the Peiraiiki Patraiki Factory, some Afghans arrive in small groups. They happily hug each other and start asking each other questions. Then they tell us: “These two guys just returned back from Albania. They tried to cross the borders from there. They were initially three, but when they woke up in the mountains, one of them had died. Now they came back and they are already discussing about what to do next. Some of the others who arrived, just came back from Athens, where they were “deported”. They walked all the way back here. And those, were just*

*deported from Italy.”*

*The Afghans readmitted from Italy started telling us: “There were fifteen of us on board. We arrived in Ancona yesterday, with the Superfast. Three of us tried to escape in order to avoid readmission and jumped from the deck. One fell on the pier and broke his heels.” As we were later informed, during our visit to Ancona, this one was hospitalized due to his severe injuries.*

*As we have also been informed from the NGO running a programme at the port of Ancona, the other two who had jumped into the sea, were not found. They either managed to escape or had drowned. And the Afghans continue: “The rest of us were caught. The Italian police beat us in the port. Four of us finally stayed in Italy, eleven persons were sent back to Patras on the same ship. When we arrived in Ancona, we got off the trucks. The police caught us and took us to a place inside the port, where they kept us for about thirty minutes. They beat us in all parts of our bodies and insulted us a lot. They asked us whether we wanted to apply for asylum and we all said yes. Nobody registered that though. Then they took photos of us. I told them that I am 17 years old, but they did not write that down. It's better they deported us back to Patras and not to Igoumenitsa, where we would be detained for a long period.”*

**H.A., from Afghanistan<sup>42</sup> / Ancona – Patras**

*“One month ago I was hiding with two friends inside a truck. The truck entered the big Superfast ferry. We were 16 persons inside the truck. Two hours before arriving to Ancona, the security guy from the ship company found us. We were making some noise, so they noticed us. They brought us up to a room on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the ship and locked us up there. There were no windows, but just four beds and a small bathroom. When the ship arrived at the Italian port, the police came and took us to the police station in the port. We were fingerprinted and they took some photos of us. One of us was*

41 Interview held on April 4, 2012 in Patras. See also: cases of A.J. (17), H.A., M (17) and M.

42 Interview held on May 13, 2012 in Patras. See also case of A. (17), M.J &, M (17), M. & H.A from Afghanistan / Brindisi - Patras

only 13 years old. They took him away. There were more minors among us, but the Italian police did not accept them. While being fingerprinted, we were also beaten. There were 10-12 police officers. They beat us up a lot. Especially one of us who refused to be fingerprinted as he knew we would be in any case deported back to Greece, was badly beaten. Three officers took him in a separate room and beat him again. Here in Greece we are used to the police violence. But if they also beat us in Italy, we won't sleep anymore at night out of fear.<sup>43</sup> There was an Afghan-speaking interpreter. He did not help us. He told us he would return in ten minutes, but he disappeared. We then walked our way back to the ship, in groups of three. We were handcuffed with our hands behind our back. The police officers followed us and started beating us again. The Italian officers, the captain of the ship (wearing a white uniform) and some ship crew men. The Greeks were insulting us: "F..k you! As..ole!" We could not understand what the Italians were saying. I do not know why they were beating us. It is so many years I am in the streets. I sleep in a cardboard box outside. Yet I did not understand the reason of these beatings. They kept us locked up in the ship for two nights and two days - almost fifteen persons in the same room of the same ship. We arrived in Patras on April 5, 2012."

#### **A. (17), from Afghanistan<sup>44</sup> / Ancona – Patra**

"It was last month. We were on the same ship with H.A. The ship arrived at the port of Ancona. The Italian police beat us all, in order to fingerprint us. Then beat us once more, when they took us back on the ship. They were pulling our ears while dragging us back to the ship. When we were readmitted, I was extremely sad. Once, I tried to leave from Greece on foot. I arrived in Hungary. I was detained there and then deported to Serbia. Wherever I go, Greece, Italy, Hungary, I find myself ending up in detention."

#### **M. (17), from Afghanistan<sup>45</sup> / Ancona – Patra**

"I was also readmitted with the same ship on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April (2012) from Ancona, together with H.A and A. (17). When we were in Ancona, I asked for asylum. I told the authorities my family is in Sweden. The Italian police just wrote my name down and returned me with the others back to Greece. I repeatedly told them that I want to stay in Italy, but the officers replied: "No, you want to go to Germany or somewhere else." They first beat me up and then brought me back to the ship. I hope I will someday manage to leave Greece. My mother, my father and my other brother are in Sweden. They arrived there in 2011. Here in Patras, the port police destroyed my SIM card and I have lost their phone numbers. I cannot contact them anymore. I wanted to try and leave today, but I had no luck."

#### **M., from Afghanistan<sup>46</sup> / Ancona – Patras**

"They found us shortly before the ship reached the port of Ancona. We could not breathe anymore. We were fifteen persons. They brought us in a cabin of the ship and gave us only some bread. Upon arrival, the Italian police asked us where we come from and where we want to go. There were two interpreters, an Afghan and a Kurdish. The police did not say anything. They wrote something on their papers and brought us to the police station, next to the port. They fingerprinted us and then returned us back to the ship. Three of us ran out from the room. They jumped from the deck. One fell on the pier and was injured. He was badly beaten by the captain of the ship, because he had tried to escape. The captain was wearing white clothes. We were on the big Superfast. The police beat us all up and locked us up in the room. I asked for some food. I had not eaten anything since leaving Greece. They replied on my request by slapping me. What can I do when the police beat me? I can only say: "thank you!" I cannot do anything else. When we returned back to Patras, those holding already a Greek paper, were released. The others stayed overnight in detention at the old port."

<sup>43</sup> See also cases of A. (17) and M. (17) for the same readmission

<sup>44</sup> Interview held on April 4, 2012 in Patras. See also case of M.J., H.A., M (17) and M.

<sup>45</sup> Interview held on April 4, 2012 in Patras. See also case of M.J., H.A., A. (17), and M.

<sup>46</sup> Interview held on April 4, 2012 in Patras. See also case of M.J., H.A., A. (17) and M (17)

*M was readmitted from Ancona with his friend M.J.*

*M. starts telling us their story:* “We arrived in Italy at the end of April (2012). I was together with my friend. We were hiding under a truck. When the ship arrived in Italy they found us. I suppose the truck driver understood we were hiding, because he suddenly started braking, as if he wanted us to fall down. Then he stopped and they checked under the truck. They saw me and pulled me out. The driver was drunk. The Italians were in blue uniforms. There were two men and two women. One of the officers kicked me and asked if there were others hiding. I was afraid and told them there was one more. We were on the big ANEK. Then, they handcuffed us. We were both taken to the police station, close to the port. My friend is younger than me. He is a minor. They fingerprinted me. They then immediately returned me to the ship. It was in the afternoon.”

*His young friend M.J. joins us and continues:* “The first thing I told the Italian officers was that I am a minor and that my brother is in Austria. I want to go to my brother. When my friend M. was brought back to the ship, a woman entered the office. She was very kind and gave me some water. She then called an interpreter and he asked me whether I want to apply for asylum. I said: “Yes!” He then went on translating by phone, the woman’s questions: “Do you want to stay in Italy?” I said again: “Yes.” He then asked me whether I have been fingerprinted in Greece and I confirmed. The woman with the help of the interpreter asked me if I have any papers from Greece, how many times had I tried to reach Italy, where I am from... We kept talking for almost 10-15 minutes. The woman told me I would stay in Italy as I am a minor and that they had to take me to the hospital for an X-ray. I saw the doctor in the hospital who checked my X-ray and then wrote on a paper, sixteen. I suppose this was my estimated age. When they brought me back to the police station, the friendly woman was no longer there. There was one of the officers. I was afraid of him. It seemed he did not like me. I think he did not care that I was a minor. They also took a photo of me. They made me sign three papers. I don’t know

why. I even showed them my Greek paper, where I was also registered as a minor. I thought they do not deport minors. They brought me also back to the ship. It was only then, I realized that I would be deported back to Greece. I burst into tears. The Italian officers grabbed me from my hair and kicked me.

I was brought in a room on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the ship, where I found my friend M. They then locked the metal door behind me. It smelled bad. We complained a lot and they took us in another room, the “cinema” and locked the door behind us. We were given food and water and were allowed to use the bathroom once.

When we arrived at the port of Patras, the Greek officers handcuffed us and we were taken to the old port. They tightly handcuffed us, as if we were a danger for them, as if we had killed many persons. It was around 2pm. After staying there for about three hours, we were released.”

“One month and twenty days ago, we were two hiding under a truck, that had arrived at the port of Ancona. It was around 6pm. I am a minor. It is even written on my Greek paper. I showed it later to the Italian authorities. They took the paper and tore it up.

The truck driver found us when the ship arrived at the port of Ancona. When the hatch of the ship opened, we ran towards it. We were caught just there, at the exit. They brought us to a big room of the Superfast. They did not ask us any questions. I was not brought to the hospital for any age assessment. They just asked me to sign a paper, but I could not understand why. I cried a lot, because they beat us so much. We were once beaten when we reached the hatch of the ship. The Italian officers beat us in the room where we were then locked. They took 85 euro from me. I had that money in my pocket. They beat me a lot! They then asked me to run in circles around myself and I was forced to take off my clothes. They even pulled my boxer shorts up to my belly and forced me run in circles around myself again. My friend was beaten

47 Interview held on May 11, 2012 in Patras

48 Interview held on May 11, 2012 in Patras. See also case of I. (15)



more than I was. His lips were bleeding. They took 200 euros from him.

During our journey back to Greece, the crew brought us water and food. We disembarked in Igoumenitsa. We were detained for twenty days in the port of Igoumenitsa. We were forty people in one room. There were many adults there. We were then transferred to Konitsa, where there's a shelter for minors. I don't understand why we were brought to Igoumenitsa. We had left Greece from the port of Patras. I told the Italian officer that I wanted to stay in Italy. He told me "No, you want to go to Germany." I have an aunt who lives in Austria. If they had kept me in Italy, I would not suffer living under these conditions here. I feel very anxious since the day of my deportation. It's been eight months since I arrived in Greece and I have spent all of this time in Patras. It is a very bad place. We have a very bad time here. The police always harass and beat us. I have been badly beaten here. Especially when in the port, the "commandos" beat a lot. Where I'm staying here, the police hunt us every day. At night we cannot move around as we can be attacked by racists."

**I. (15), from Afghanistan<sup>49</sup> / Ancona – Igoumenitsa**

"We arrived at the port of Ancona 45 days before. We were on the big Superfast. We were two, hiding under a truck. Before disembarking, the truck driver inspected his truck. He saw us and called the security guy from the ship. We wanted to escape and started running toward the hatch of the ship. Just in front of it there were some Italian police officers, but they did not notice us immediately. We started running and the officers wearing blue uniforms caught us. We were brought up in a room, where we were locked up. It's the ship's prison. It's on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the ship, next to the elevator. It was a small cabin, with four beds inside. The Italian officers searched our clothing and took our money. When I asked for my money back they beat me. They only asked us where we were from and nothing else. Nobody asked us how old we were and there was no interpreter with them. They just left and locked the door behind us. Even though we told them we came from Patras, we were returned back to Igoumenitsa. We do not know why.

<sup>49</sup> Interview held on May 11, 2012 in Patras. See also case of A.A. (15)

I told the coast guard at the port of Igoumenitsa that I am 15 years old and he registered me as a minor. We were detained in some cells at the port, close to the sea. There are two separated rooms with kind of a yard place enclosed by a fence. It's like a cave. It was very dirty and a horrible place. I went on a hunger strike just for a day and we were then transferred to Konitsa. A place for minors like me.

When we were readmitted back to Greece, my head was empty. I had never thought before that if I ever manage to reach Italy, they would send me back to Greece. I thought they would at least ask me where do I come from, why I left from my country, how old am I, what I need... but they did not ask anything. They just sent me back to Greece."

**M. (17), from Morocco<sup>50</sup> / Ancona - Patras**

"My brother lives in Italy. He has a residence permit there. I first came to Greece four months ago. I was arrested and I was registered as a minor by the Greek authorities. Ten days ago I finally managed to reach Ancona. I was hiding on a truck. The police found me once the ship arrived there. They transferred me to the police station, close to the port. They asked my name, my age and where do I come from. I replied to them. I told them I am 17 years old. There was no interpreter present. I tried to tell them about my brother. I wanted to call him and speak with him. I want to stay with him. I signed a paper. I do not know what it was. I did not see anyone else. I was not transferred to the hospital. I was not allowed any access to a telephone. I stayed for a day in a cell. I was not given any food or water. The day after, around 6pm I was "deported" back to Patras. I was then released. I felt exhausted."

**S.M. (mother); M.J. (13 - daughter) and Y.J. (5 - son), from Afghanistan / Ancona – Patras**

The family arrived at the port of Ancona on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February (2012) with Minoan Lines. They wanted to reach the other son residing in Germany and apply for family reunification. They were readmitted back to Patras, on the same ship. During their

<sup>50</sup> Interview held on May 12, 2012 in Patras



interview with an employee from the GUS NGO, which runs a programme at the port of Ancona, the family mentioned that they were separated from the rest of the family (the husband and the other son) seven months ago. They did not want to stay in Italy but to reunify with the other son of the family in Germany. They were readmitted back to Greece. The Italian NGO then contacted the Greek Council for Refugees asking to trace the family and assist them apply for family reunification under the Dublin II Regulation from Greece.”

**M.T. (wife); S.T. (husband), from Afghanistan / Ancona – Igoumenitsa**

M.T. arrived with her husband S.T. at the port of Ancona on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February with the Superfast. They were arrested for holding false documents. They were interviewed by a member of the GUS NGO working at the port of Ancona. They said they were looking for their six children from which they had been separated. They were readmitted back to Greece on the same ship.

As Greek Council for Refugee was later informed by the Italian NGO: “Since the couple said they were looking for their children and did not want to stay in Italy, but reach their relatives in Belgium, the Border Police proceeded with their readmission to Greece on board of the same motorship.”

### 3.1.2. Bari

**A. (16), from Afghanistan<sup>51</sup> / Bari - Patras**

*A. is a minor whose brother has a humanitarian protection status in Italy. Their father is dead and he has no contact with his mother, as they are not in good terms. When he was eight years old he left with his elder brother and went to Iran, where they worked. Then his brother left and managed to reach Italy. A was working as a shoemaker in Iran.*

I told the Greek police I was 23 years old, as I did not want to stay in prison for three months. I have been living in Patras for the last seven months. Once, I tried to leave Greece from the land borders. I had managed to reach Croatia but was then chain-readmitted back to Greece.

Four months ago I arrived in Italy, at the port of Bari, on the small Superfast. I was hiding for 18 hours before the ship’s departure and I stayed there hiding for a total of 36 hours! The weather was bad and the ship left with a delay. I was hiding in a truck. The truck driver found me before arriving at the port of Patras. Two men dressed in a red uniform checked the trucks. When they found me I tried to escape and ran outside into the port. A truck stopped my way. Two Italian police officers in plainclothes ran after me. When I was caught, half of my body was practically outside from the port and half inside. They ordered me to sit down. I showed to them my Greek deportation order. I told them my brother lives in Italy and I gave them his phone number and told them that I am 16 years old. Then some guys from the Superfast came and started calling me: “malaka, malaka”. I was handcuffed and taken into a car. I thought they would bring me to the camp, but they brought me back to the ship and locked me in a room. I shouted to them: “Not Greek, not Greek. Problem! Problem! Sixteen-sixteen!”

This room was somewhere in the upper floor of the ship, where they store the alcohol. We were two Afghans locked up in that room. My friend is also a minor. At night the ship arrived back to Patras. In Italy they did not ask me anything, they did not take my fingerprints or any photo. I was never brought to the Police station. When I was brought back to the ship I thought there is no safety for me in Greece! We were not allowed to go to the bathroom. We had to pee in bottles. We were given two sandwiches and one bottle of water. Upon arrival to Patras, we were brought at the “commandos” place at the old port. We were fingerprinted and they checked our documents. I was released, but my friend was registered as an adult and was “deported” to Athens.”

“I came to Greece in August 2011. When I arrived,

Q. was readmitted twice from Italy to Greece - the first time from Bari and the second from Venice. When we asked him what he was thinking after being deported twice from Italy, he replied **“The third time I will stay!”**

“Six months ago I managed to reach Italy for the first time. I was on the small Superfast for Bari. We were five persons hiding in a truck, transporting grapes. When the ship arrived at the port the truck disembarked and parked somewhere. Two hours had passed and we thought we had made it. We waited for the truck to start and then exit the port. Suddenly, we heard voices coming from behind the truck. The vehicles’ doors were opened and closed again. The truck then started driving in circles and then stopped. We later saw that we were in a building, with doors on both sides: the front and the back. I now know this was a scanner. Then the truck doors opened again. We saw around ten persons in plainclothes, holding cameras. Some workers slowly unloaded the fruit boxes, until they almost reached us. Among them, there were some people from the ship, the Italian police and the others with the cameras. I could watch them through a small hole in between the fruit boxes. They were taking photos of us. I could not feel my body anymore. I could not feel my legs. We had not eaten anything for hours. They took us out one by one and then surrounded us. We were told to sit down. They asked for our papers. We had hidden them. We were three adults and two minors. The Bulgarian truck driver locked the truck’s door and left. The officers searched our clothing. The three adults handed over their papers, we, the minors didn’t. A police van took the adults away. Then a fat guy wearing a white and red shirt appeared. He asked why they only took the adults and not us. The van returned and we entered. We were then brought back to the small Superfast. Nobody asked us any questions. We were taken to the floor above the parking of the ship. On the left, as you embark. There was a metal door. We were given a sandwich and a juice. Then, we were deported back to Patras. We had told the Italian police that we entered from Patras. Upon arrival, we were transferred to the old port where we stayed for five hours. Then they let us go.”

<sup>52</sup> Interview held on May 11, 2012 in Patras. See also Venice-Patras

“On April 2011, I was in Igoumenitsa. I hid myself under a truck, which embarked on the ship to Bari. The driver found me during the journey and handed me over to the responsible person of the ship. I was detained in the ship’s prison. When the ship arrived in Bari, I was not taken out of the ship. I did not meet someone from the Italian police. I was just returned back to Igoumenitsa. During the return trip, they did not give me any food or water. I had just a slice of dry bread. I was not allowed to go to the toilet and I had to pee in a plastic bottle.”

### 3.1.3. Brindisi

“Six months ago I managed to arrive in Brindisi. The truck I was hiding disembarked but the guards noticed me hiding in the truck and immediately returned me to the Endeavour ship I had come with. I told the Italian officers that I want to stay in Italy and apply for asylum, but they didn’t listen to me. They didn’t even take my fingerprints. I was locked in a room on one of the upper floors.”

### 3.1.4. Venice

“The second time I was sent back to Greece from Italy, I had arrived at the port of Venice with ANEK Lines. This happened a month ago. We were two persons inside a truck full of oranges. The ship arrived and the truck disembarked. A machine came to unload the oranges and they found us. The driver saw us first. He noticed us when he climbed

<sup>53</sup> Interview held on May 13, 2012 in Patras. See also Venice - Patras

<sup>54</sup> Interview held on May 12, 2012 in Patras

<sup>55</sup> Interview held on May 11, 2012 in Patras. See also Bari-Patras

on the truck. Then he called the police. When the officers finished unloading all the boxes, they could see both of us. We came out. There were 3-4 police officers and some other persons in plainclothes who were taking photos of us. My friend is also a minor. I think he is 14 to 15 years old - even younger than me. There was no interpreter. They asked us with gestures if we had eaten anything. We let them understand that we were hungry. They took us in a car. We asked where they were bringing us and they replied: "Camp! Camp!" They brought us back to the ship. My friend started crying. They told him: "No problem!" We were taken on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the ship into a white room. One of its walls was full of inscriptions, memories of others who were also deported. The ship crew gave us a sandwich and a bottle of water. When we wanted to use the bathroom, we had to knock that door. When we arrived in Patras, we were taken to the old port. We were interrogated for about an hour. They wanted to know exactly how we managed to go to Italy. Then we were released. In Italy, they only asked us if we speak English."

**H.R. (17), from Afghanistan<sup>56</sup> / Venice - Patras**

"It was in August 2011. They checked the ship before arriving at the port of Venice. We were on the Minoan Lines. We were inside a truck full of alcohol and we could not breathe anymore. So we started knocking, so that someone could notice us. They found us four hours before reaching the port of Venice. We were locked up, in the garage, in a storage room. The crew was ok with us. In Venice, we were taken to the police station in the port, around 1am. We stayed there until 12am and were then taken back on the same ship and in the same room. No organization came to see us. Two friends of mine who could speak English begged the police to let us stay in Italy and not deport us. But we were all sent back to Greece. We were seven persons. We could not go to the toilet. They gave us bottles to pee in."

**M., from Afghanistan<sup>57</sup> / Venice - Patras**

"Three months ago I managed to arrive in Venice. The ship arrived around 11pm. I was hiding under a truck on its axle. They found me during a control, before arriving at the port. The driver turned on the engine and then he turned it off again. He understood something was wrong. Then he came to check together with the ship security and saw me. They locked me up in a room. There was a security camera in that room. I was only allowed to go at the toilet once. It was very cold. I was wearing just a t-shirt. They brought me some food, but my hands were black from the truck. The Italian police came and asked me some questions. I told them I was 16 years old but they did not believe me. I had to sign a paper. There was no interpreter with them. They did not ask me if I wanted to apply for asylum. I stayed there, until the ship returned back to Greece. In Patras I was held in the container at the old port. I was in a miserable health condition when they let me go."

**M.J. (17), from Afghanistan<sup>58</sup> / Venice - Patras**

"I arrived in Venice two months ago. It was with ANEK Lines. I was hiding under a truck. The engine of the truck broke. Then two members of the crew found me. I had been hiding for two days and a half. I could not come out because I was unable to move. There was also a friend of mine. Finally, the Italian police had to pull me out. They brought us some hot water. I fainted. An ambulance came, but the police did not allow them to take us to the hospital. Instead the police officers lifted us up and brought us in a room, where they locked us up. After that we did not see anybody. They gave us once some food. We drank water from the bathroom. Upon arrival to Patras, we stayed overnight in the container in the old port. Then I was released."

**J., from Afghanistan<sup>59</sup> / Venice - Patras**

"Three months ago we were hiding inside a truck.



We were three persons. The ship arrived at the port of Venice and the truck disembarked. It parked somewhere inside the port, for about 6 ½ hours, I think. It had been around 12pm when the ship left from Patras. A 48hours journey, I think. Upon arrival, I could not wait anymore. I could not breathe. So I started knocking. The truck driver heard the sound and opened the truck. The Italian officers gave us some water and then handcuffed us. We were taken to the police station, inside the port, we were fingerprinted and they took photos of us. They detained us there for about an hour. Then they took us back on the ship. The Italian officers asked us if we had paid the truck driver to bring us to Italy. We denied. They did not ask us whether we wanted to apply for asylum or if we wanted to stay in Italy. Back on the ship, they kept us in a room full of handwritten graffiti - names, dates and some other stuff. They gave us some food and water and we were allowed to go to the bathroom. Upon arrival, they took us to the old port, where we stayed for five hours. Then they let us go.”

**Q., from Afghanistan<sup>60</sup> / Venice – Patra**

“I was readmitted back to Patras from Venice, two days ago. I was alone. A member of the crew found me before the truck could disembark. I was brought to the police station. An interpreter asked me some questions. He did not introduce himself to me. He just told me he was an interpreter. Then he translated the questions of the police officers: Where I came from, if I came from Patras and where I planned to go. They asked me: “Sweden? Norway?” I did not want to return to Greece. They forced me back to the ship and locked me into one room. Then they gave me something to eat, but nothing to drink. I drank water from the toilet. When I arrived to Patras, I was held for one night in the old port of Patras. I was then taken to the police station of Patras and sent to Athens.”

**A. (17), from Morocco<sup>61</sup> / Venice - Patras**

“It was last month. I managed to hide inside the Minoan Lines, at the port of Patras. The ship was going to Venice. I was for thirty-six hours in the ship. Upon arrival at the port of Venice, the police arrested me. I was taken to the police station in the port. They searched our clothing. There was an interpreter from Iraq. He asked me how old I was. I told him I was 17 years old. I gave them all the details. They took photos of me. Then they asked me how long I have been in Greece, how I came to Italy, from which port I left, how I lived in Greece... I was sent back to Greece on the same ship. We were seven persons.”

**J., from Eritrea<sup>62</sup> / Venice – Patra**

“I left my country because my life was in danger, for political reasons. I had been tortured there. Ever since I left, I have health problems. I have only one kidney. Since I arrived in Greece, I am homeless. I was homeless in Igoumenitsa and I am homeless in Patras, trying to survive. I have lodged an asylum application in Igoumenitsa, but it was rejected. The appeal is still pending.

I’m trying to leave this country. I managed to enter a ship twice. Both of the times I was deported back to Greece. Last time, it was in August 2011. I was in Patras. I hid in the ANEK Lines ship and arrived at the port of Venice. I got out of the truck. It was standing at the parking lot of the port. I tried to run away. The Italian officers caught me, while I was still inside the port. They searched me and just asked: “Are you Somali?” I replied: “No, I’m Eritrean”. They insisted. “Somali.” They did not ask me anything else. Not even my name. I tried to tell them that I need protection, that I am a refugee and that I do not want to be sent back to Greece. They could not understand me. I could not understand them. We tried to communicate with gestures. I saw the Italians speaking with the captain of the ship. It seemed as if the captain first refused to take me back, but finally he agreed. I was deported back to Greece with the same ship.”

61 Interview held on April 3, 2012 in Patras

62 Interview held on May 13, 2012 in Patras. See also Bari- Igoumenitsa



### 3.2. Readmissions of arrivals at “unofficial border points” in Calabria and Lecce

Boat people fleeing from their countries of origin undertake very risky trips over the sea on small boats or other maritime transportation means. Coming from Greece, they hope to finally reach a safe haven after arriving at the southern shores of Italy, in Lecce and Calabria.

There are numerous and frequent reports of people who loose their life during their effort to cross this EU-border. Many others manage to arrive, but then are collectively and indiscriminately readmitted back to Greece.

Often those confined are detained in school’s gyms or in other provisional places, before being sent back to Greece - a country from where they just escaped to save their lives.

#### **Y. and M., from Syria<sup>63</sup>: Rocella Jonica, Calabria / Bari - Patra**

Y. and M. are two brothers from Syria. They arrived with a boat in the Italian coast of Rocella Jonica on September 3, 2011. Their family (mother and siblings) is legally residing in Italy for almost 10 years.

The two youngest boys were the last ones left behind in Syria, living with their grand mother. Both of them were arrested, imprisoned and one of the boys - as his mother told us - was tortured by the Syrian authorities.

Upon arrival at the Italian coast, the two brothers along with the other persons in the boat were detained in a gym of an elementary school. They were denied access to a lawyer, an organization and a phone. Their mother knew they were coming to Italy, but eventually she met them when she came to Greece after having being informed of their readmission on September 10, 2011.

#### **A. (16), from Afghanistan<sup>64</sup>: Rocella Jonica, Calabria**

“We arrived on February 20, 2012 with a boat in Italy. The boat stopped in the middle of the sea, at a visible distance from the coast. We had to jump into the cold sea and swim to shore. We were all wet when we arrived. We started walking in order to find the police. It was very cold. When the police arrived they took me and some other minors to a special facility for the minors. A lawyer was appointed as my guardian. I don’t know what happened to the others though. I never saw them again. They were immediately taken to a different place. I guess they were deported back to Greece. Only two of us stayed in Italy.”

#### **A., from Afghanistan<sup>65</sup>: Siderno, Calabria / Bari - Patra**

*A. worked in Afghanistan for the Army, collaborating with the British ISAF Forces. Following his traumatic experience and subsequent his readmission from Bari, he was so disappointed and told us that he contemplates taking a risk and return back to Afghanistan. He had managed to leave from Greece with an inflatable boat on April 24, 2012.*

“We were 43 persons on that boat. 38 Afghans and 5 Banglas. The journey was very difficult. The boat jumped up and down in the waves forcefully and we were twisted around from these abrupt moves. Some did not make it through the journey. One of us died after four hours in the sea while another one died few hours later probably because his spine broke too. When the boat reached the Calabrese coasts it was night. It stopped at a distance from the shore. We were forced to jump into the water and swim to the shore. I was violently pushed into the water and thought I would die. I could see the heads of some others appearing now and then on the top of the water like small flying fishes. Some others helped me. I started swimming and noticed some persons finding it difficult to keep floating. I tried to carry out a corpse of one of the dead persons. You know, I am not afraid of death. I was in the war. I saw many things before leaving

63 Interview held on September 12, 2011 at GCR

64 Interview held on April 4, 2012 in Italy  
65 Interview held on June 15, 2012 in Athens

Afghanistan.

I remember there was a helicopter flying over our heads, when we were in Italy. When I arrived at the shore, I sat on the rail trails alone. On the opposite side there was a house and one of its residents saw me carrying out the corpse from the water. I made a sign to him to call an ambulance. Five minutes later the ambulance arrived and it carried away the injured and the dead ones. I was only wearing my underwear when I started walking down the street. I found some clothes and dressed up. On my way I found some of the others who were with me on the same boat. The police arrived shortly after and picked us up one by one.

They brought us to a place not far from Siderno, where we arrived. I saw a sign on the street. It was kind of a small prison, but we fitted all forty inside. I was told the place belonged to a church. The building had seven floors. We were kept on the seventh floor. At the entrance there was the police guarding.

The police asked us why we came to Italy. What a question! We have problems. That's why we came. The first day in this prison, the officers took six of us around 4pm to the Court. I was one of them. I was not in such a bad state, but one of us was too weak and sick and I almost had to carry him on my back. At the court, I was asked about the smugglers. It was the one and only time I saw an interpreter during our stay in Italy. At 2am we were brought back after some hours of interrogation. I guess we were all witnesses.

Everything in Italy is illegal! One other day, they took us in groups of ten to another place to fingerprint us. Nobody asked us any question there. I told them in English that I want to seek asylum in Italy. A woman in plainclothes looked at me and shook her head disagreeing. She said: "That's not possible anymore. There's a new rule!"

In the prison we were kept, there was a man working for this church. He was very nice with us. He brought us food every day. Some times other people would come. They would just look at us and laugh. The building did not look like a church.

When we were caught and brought to that place, our clothes were wet. They brought us dry clothes after three days.

We stayed there for 13 days. The police only asked

us where we came from and how we came. They did not ask us if we want to apply for asylum and there was no interpreter anyway. There was also no lawyer. Nobody explained us our rights or the procedures. Nothing! I cannot feel respect neither for Europe nor for Italy for what they are doing to us!

The day before deporting us back to Greece, it was the first time we were allowed to make a phone call. The day after, at 5am, while I was praying an officer came. I asked him if he had any good news for us. He said: "I have passports for you!" I asked: "You mean you will deport us?" Then he just laughed.

Five cars came with officers. They took us on a bus to the port of Bari, where we waited inside the bus until the afternoon. They then drove next to a building of the port and asked us whether we wanted to go to the toilet. We had already peed in bottles, so nobody left the bus. The bus then brought us back to the big Superfast ferry.

I think they just kept us in detention for so long, until those injured would get better and they could be sent back to Greece with us. We were 33 persons returned back to Patras. It was the 8<sup>th</sup> of May (2012). Only four of us were allowed to stay, because they were registered as minors, even though there were seven more minors among us who were sent back to Greece.

Nevertheless among us there were seven minors who were readmitted back to Greece. The Italian officers did not listen to the age we were giving them. They were deciding on their own who was a minor and who was not - according to their own estimations. Police in plainclothes came and one by one we were brought in the ship, as if we were "normal" passengers. We were brought in a room with chairs. We were locked inside there during our journey to Greece.

The Italian officers beat some of us badly. We asked what was the problem. They broke the tooth of one guy. Another one was bleeding. A third one got crazy, as if he was possessed by a "Jinni" (ghost). The officers said: "You came here illegally, we deport you back!" But why they do not ask us the reasons we came here, I wondered loudly. They did not reply. I asked many questions, but they could not answer. Most of us were crying. I was laughing. I told them: "If you want to deport us, then do so, but answer to our questions."

The ship left. We got some food, but nobody could eat. We thought the Greek police would beat us when we arrive there, but they did not. We arrived in Patras around 4pm. A police van took us to the police station. We were fingerprinted and were given a deportation order.

In Italy they did not give us any paper. I want to ask the Italians, why do you take our fingerprints, if you just want to send us back to Greece? I did not kill anyone. I just travelled with no documents. I am speaking for me and on behalf of all my friends. I face serious problems in Afghanistan. Maybe it is better to die there. I never cried during the readmission. The others did. They said, their families had even sold their own clothes to make it possible for them to reach a safe place. When I heard this, I noticed I had also started to cry.

Some of us, who have been returned back to Greece now have gone crazy. The night following our arrival in Greece, I felt awful. My temporal artery was swollen. I went to the hospital, but they did not help me, because I do not have a pink card. Now, I usually don't feel anything about this deportation. I cannot change it anyway. It happened. Sometimes I suddenly become very sad. There is no sense in all this. I risked my life for coming to Greece and I risked it once more to arrive in Italy. It took me three days to get better, after the deportation from Italy. Then I got very sad again. The thought of my mother and my brother give me strength. These are the only people I have. I have nothing else. Those who died in the hospital in Italy... What do their families have now? We took their mobile phones and called their families to tell them the bad news.”<sup>66</sup>

66 See Italian news: Immigrati, in 44 sbarcati a Locri, un morto e due feriti:

Sono in tutto 44 gli immigrati, prevalentemente afgani, giunti stamani a Locri a bordo di un natante che, secondo le prime testimonianze, li avrebbe abbandonati ad alcune decine di metri dalla riva, costringendoli a nuotare e provocando la morte di un uomo di 36 anni ed il ferimento di altre due persone, attualmente ricoverate in gravi condizioni presso l'ospedale di Locri.

Sulla spiaggia sono stati ritrovati anche degli indumenti, e l'ipotesi piu' probabile e' che altri immigrati siano riusciti a sfuggire. Le 44 persone sono arrivate dall'Afghanistan a bordo di un peschereccio partito dalle coste della Grecia. Due giorni di mare con pochissima acqua e viveri anche se la navigazione e' stata aiutata dalle buone condizioni del mare.

La vittima, dai primo sommari racconti dei sopravvissuti, potrebbe essere morta di stenti dopo l'ultimo sforzo compiuto per raggiungere la terra ferma, pare che non sapesse nuotare, ma sulle cause del decesso si aspetta l'esito della perizia del medico legale. Tutti gli immigrati intanto dopo le prime cure sono stati trasportati con l'aiuto della Protezione civile nel centro di prima accoglienza presso la Confarternita di Siderno Superiore diretta da don Salvatore Monte, dove si sono svolte le operazioni di identificazione. (AGI)

#### **M.J., from Afghanistan<sup>67</sup>: Lecce / Bari – Patras**

On April 15 (2012) a boat with 45 refugees arrived in Calabria in the southern coasts of Italy. Those arrested were detained in the police station in Lecce. Among them, there were two minor brothers. The Italian authorities registered only one of them as a minor, the other was registered as an adult. After 25 days in detention, the two brothers were separated. The “adult” was readmitted to Greece with the Superfast, along with others from the port of Bari.

#### **N., from Algeria<sup>68</sup>: Lecce / Bari - Patras**

“Some days ago (3-4), I tried to travel on a Zodiac from Corfu to Lecce (near Brindisi). I was arrested in the port of Lecce. The Italian authorities deported me back to Patras on a passenger ship. In Italy I was not asked anything at all. I was not fingerprinted. There was no interpreter. I was not given the chance to ask for asylum. Upon arrival in Patras, I was arrested and then transferred to Athens before being released.

I didn't think it would be like this when I reach Italy. In the end I understood... All the roads lead to Rome, only this one doesn't!”

Rc2/Ros

[http://www.corriere.it/cronache/12\\_aprile\\_26/ricchio-sbarco-migranti-locride\\_1fe73ceo-8fb9-11e1-b563-5183986f349a.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/cronache/12_aprile_26/ricchio-sbarco-migranti-locride_1fe73ceo-8fb9-11e1-b563-5183986f349a.shtml)

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