

In Greece, Special Representative Pritchard urges European solidarity on migration



Mark Pritchard meets with aid workers at a refugee camp outside Athens, 5 March 2020.

From 4-6 March, OSCE PA Special Representative on South East Europe Mark Pritchard (United Kingdom) met with a range of political actors in Athens, including ministers, parliamentarians and representatives of international organizations. He also visited the Asylum Schisto Accommodation Site for Refugees on the outskirts of the city, which included a trilateral meeting with the International Organization for Migration and experts from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Following meetings, Pritchard expressed confidence that the response to the border emergency is being handled with consideration for the best interests of refugees and migrants, Greek society, and Europe as a whole. However, he cautioned all stakeholders to use responsible political rhetoric and to pursue broad-based dialogue.

He urged Europe to accept responsibility in assisting Greece, with an emphasis on tangible burden-sharing beyond financial solidarity. "This is not only a Greek emergency," he said. "It's a collective one. Collective emergencies and challenges demand collective responsibility. The recent high-level EU visit needs to have tangible and practical outcomes."

Pritchard suggested that a revised EU-Turkey Statement should ensure that the Greek perspective was "fully considered and appreciated" by the European Union. He also suggested that Greece and Turkey should establish a joint working group on the issue of relocation and resettlement of proven asylum seekers into the EU, but this could only be done once current tensions have eased.



Speaker Konstantinos Tasoulas and Mark Pritchard meet in Athens, 5 March 2020.

In meetings with Minister for Agriculture Makis Voridis, Minister for Migration and Asylum Notis Mitarakis, and Minister for Development and Investment Adonis Georgiadis, much of the discussion focused on migration-related fatigue among local inhabitants in Greece, particularly on the islands. The interlocutors stressed that the situation is placing strain on the Greek coastal and border police as well as on Greece's ability to cope with large-scale migration flows.

Meetings were also held with Speaker of the Parliament Konstantinos Tasoulas, Ambassador Eleni Sourani, Secretary General for Public Order Konstantinos Tsouvalas, and Members of the Standing Committee on National Defense and Foreign Affairs, the Special Standing Committee on European Affairs, and opposition leader Alexis Tsipras, President of SYRIZA. He also met with Georgios Stylios, Head of the Greek delegation to the OSCE PA.

Besides migration, talks focused on regional developments, with Pritchard expressing hope that North Macedonia will remain committed to the Prespa Agreement, including after the 12 April parliamentary elections. The sides discussed regional co-operation and the OSCE's work in South East Europe.

Pritchard was briefed on key domestic issues, unemployment, youth engagement and education, as well as the reform agenda on issues such as the pension system, tax, and corruption. Interlocutors also discussed national contingency planning and preparedness for the public health concerns surrounding the coronavirus outbreak.

Update on OSCE PA activities

OSCE PA activities are under scrutiny in light of public health concerns surrounding the coronavirus outbreak. The PA's election observation mission to North Macedonia, scheduled presidential visits to the EU and France, and participation in the OSCE SEE Early Warning Focal Points meeting and an OSCE Central Asia HoD meeting have been cancelled. Other events, including the Bureau meeting in Copenhagen, are tentatively proceeding as scheduled. The PA is participating in the OSCE's COVID-19 Taskforce and Secretary General Roberto Montella has circulated an Interoffice Memorandum at the Secretariat with instructions and recommendations aimed at minimizing risks to Members and staff.

Featured tweets @oscepa

OSCE PA President George Tsereteli (Georgia) and Special Representative on Gender Issues Hedy Fry (Canada) tweeted on Sunday to mark International Women's Day. "We remember that meeting global challenges means empowering women," tweeted President Tsereteli. Fry applauded advances in gender equality but noted that 25 years after the Beijing World Conference on Women, many women still lack rights around the world.



Dr. Hedy Fry
@HedyFry

Happy #WomensDay ♀! As @OSCEPA's Special Rep on Gender Issues I applaud our advances in gender equality. There's room for improvement—25 yrs after Beijing, not all women have human rights. Today, let's celebrate women in the workplace & gov & redouble efforts to 📈 gender parity.