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## GREECE LEFT ALONE IN THE REFUGEE CRISIS

- 09.12.2016

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DW.de

The envisioned resettlement of refugees around the European Union has not worked. Now more of them can be sent back to Greece. Bernd Riegert reports from Brussels.

EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos is "not the happiest person on earth," he said in Brussels as he presented the latest figures for EU refugee and migration policy. EU member states are still accepting too few asylum seekers waiting in Greece and Italy, the arrival point for most refugees and migrants. The intra-EU agreement to resettle refugees has faltered since a large majority agreed to it at the height of the refugee crisis in September 2015. Of 160,000 refugees intended to have been resettled around the EU by October 2016, about 5 percent, or 8,000 people, have been.

"The refugee crisis is not over," Avramopoulos said. "It just has taken on new form since a year ago." Then, people came via the Balkans to central Europe. Now, they are finding their way to Italy and Greece. Italy received nearly as many migrants by boat this year as last. In Greece, 70,000 people are waiting in ill-equipped shelters to be processed, settled or deported. Living conditions for refugees in Greece do not meet European standards, DW reported on Wednesday. The European Commission and Greece have jumpstarted projects to winterize refugee camps and provide warmer clothing to those there.

### No consequences for noncompliance

The European Commission wants to expedite refugee resettlement from Greece and Italy. Each month, EU member states should receive 2,000 people from Greece and 1,000 from Italy. Avramopoulos has said repeatedly this is to be the goal, to little effect. "We are not prepared to use sanctions or leverage," he said. In principle, the European Commission could penalize countries like Poland, Hungary, Denmark, Slovakia and the Czech Republic for taking no refugees, although almost no EU states have fulfilled their quota. Hungary and Poland's leaders prefer to speak of "flexible" solidarity, say EU diplomats, who add it "just never happens." Greece and Italy are left to deal with the problem on their own.

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### Deportations back to Greece

More pressure will mount on Greece starting on March 15, 2017, when those who reach Austria, Slovenia, Hungary or Bulgaria through Greece and the Balkans can be returned to Greece, in

accordance with the Dublin III Regulation. This has so far been suspended, given conditions in Greece are failing to meet European standards and legal norms. The European Commission now holds a different view, urging Greece to do more to expedite the asylum process. Land borders with Albania and Macedonia are to be better secured with assistance from a new EU border security group. The Dublin III provisions, fought hard for especially by Germany, Austria and Hungary, could then take effect as of March, Avramopoulos said. They would be applied only to newly-arrived adults, not to those already in the EU.

Turkey upholding its end of the deal, but not Greece

Despite tensions with the EU and threats to the contrary, Turkey has been fulfilling its obligations in the refugee deal struck with the EU in March 2016. Refugee flows from Turkey have been reduced to about 80 per day. Greece has been unable to send them back, as outlined in the agreement, returning just 95 refugees so far. The European Commission has pushed Greece to accelerate the process, making sufficient money and resources available for this purpose.

"Turkey has implemented everything, but Greece isn't fulfilling the EU side of the agreement," diplomats in Brussels said.

Turkey receives financial support from the EU to care for the refugees. EU membership talks meanwhile have not intensified. Turkey is separately calling for EU travel visa restrictions to be lifted. In exchange, the EU wants an easing of Turkey's anti-terror laws. In the aftermath of the failed coup in July and subsequent purges, EU diplomats see little chance for a change to the visa requirements for Turkish travelers. As for EU membership, European Parliament recently recommended to suspend negotiations.

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