2nd Round Table with National Human Rights Institutions / 4th European Meeting of National Institutions

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Issues relating to reception and access of asylum seekers to the asylum procedure in Greece
(Summary of report of 6 June 2002∗)

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∗ This is an unofficial summary of the original Greek report.
1. The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) has already, through two reports of 2001 published in its annual report 2001, pointed to a range of serious issues relating to asylum practice in Greece that the competent Greek authorities are to tackle.

2. The issue of asylum seekers’ reception and their access to asylum procedure in Greece has been raised by a number of organizations dealing with refugee protection in Greece, including the Greek Council for Refugees, the Greek Ombudsman and UNHCR BO for Greece. NCHR has been in touch and has held consultations with all these organizations.

3. NCHR expressed its grave concern at reports of international NGOs, such as Amnesty International and OMCT, regarding alleged instances of refoulement of asylum seekers by Greek authorities in late 2001.

4. NCHR issued a series of recommendations to the competent Greek authorities for the development of an efficient asylum practice. According to NCHR:
   - Authorities arresting asylum seekers, especially in border areas, are to inform the detainees about the Greek asylum procedure and their concomitant rights
   - Detention of asylum seekers should always be an exception and take place only when expressly provided for by law
   - Authorities are to safeguard asylum seekers’ right to legal aid according to European and international human rights law
   - NCHR proposes the installation of telephone lines in all aliens’ detention centers, with information in at least three foreign languages spoken by asylum seekers in Greece, so that the latter have access to charitable organizations providing legal and social aid.
   - Asylum seekers should be allowed access to any person they wish to contact in order to inform them about their case.
   - NCHR urges the competent Greek authorities to urgently proceed to the creation of new permanent state reception centers for asylum seekers where the latter would be able to initiate asylum procedure as well.
   - NCHR urges the Greek authorities to immediately proceed to the application of article 48 of Law 2910/2001, as amended by Law 3013/2002, which provides for the establishment of regional detention centers for aliens subject to administrative deportation.
   - NCHR urges the competent Greek authorities to immediately proceed to the establishment of a central coordinating inter-ministerial body competent to act in all cases of mass arrivals of aliens or asylum seekers on Greek territory.

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