

Mr Nils Muižnieks
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe
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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE

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Dear Commissioner,

THE HUMAN COST OF FORTRESS EUROPE: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES AT EUROPE'S BORDERS

Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to our enclosed report [The human cost of Fortress Europe: Human rights violations against migrants and refugees at Europe's borders](#), published today. The report shows how the European Union (EU)'s and its member states' migration policies and border control practices are preventing refugees from accessing asylum in the EU and putting their lives at risk in the course of increasingly perilous journeys.

The EU is funding its migration policy to the tune of billions of Euros. Between 2007 and 2013, nearly €2 billion was spent on the protection of the EU's external borders, but only €700 million on improving the situation for asylum-seekers and refugees within the EU. The EU and its member states are also cooperating with and funding neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Morocco and Libya, to create a buffer zone around the EU in an effort to stop migrants and refugees before they even reach Europe's borders. At the same time they are turning a blind eye to the human rights abuses migrants and refugees are suffering in these countries.

Refugees and migrants that do make it to Europe's borders risk being pushed back. Amnesty International has documented push-backs by border guards in Bulgaria and, in particular, Greece, where the practice is widespread. Moreover, in February 2014, the Spanish Civil Guard opened fire with rubber projectiles, blanks and tear gas against about 250 migrants and refugees swimming from Morocco along the beach towards Ceuta, the Spanish enclave in North Africa. Fourteen people lost their lives. Twenty-three people who managed to reach the beach were immediately returned, apparently without access to any formal asylum procedure. Push-backs are unlawful, deny people the right to seek asylum, typically involve violence and at times even endanger lives.

While effectiveness of this policy in stemming the flow of irregular migrants and refugees is, at best, questionable, the cost in human lives and misery is incalculable and is being paid by some of the world's most vulnerable people. In the face of ever greater obstacles to reaching Europe by land, refugees and migrants are increasingly taking the more dangerous sea routes to Greece and Italy. Every year hundreds of people die trying to reach Europe's shores. EU member states are violating their international and regional human rights obligations, while the EU itself appears to have abandoned its founding principles and values by turning a blind eye to violations at its borders.

Amnesty International calls on you to continue taking into account these concerns during your further thematic work on migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. This report details some of the most immediate causes for these tragedies at Europe's borders, which lie in the policies and practices adopted by EU member states. These can and must be reformed. All EU migration policies must be open to effective, independent and impartial monitoring of the measures adopted and their impact on the human rights of refugees and migrants, including through the Council of Europe and its monitoring mechanisms.

We thank you for your attention and we remain at your disposal should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Nicolas J. Beger
Director
Amnesty International European Institutions Office