



## **N-O-W International Mayors' Conference, July 21-23 in Athens, Greece Press release**

**N-O-W**  
International  
Mayors'  
Conference

### **"These People are not numbers, and they are no animals!"**

Athens, July 22, 2016 – Mayors from Greece, Turkey and Italy are meeting at the N-O-W International Mayors' Conference in Athens together with members of the European Parliament, migration experts, refugees and representatives of NGOs to assess the EU-Turkey agreement on handling migration flows.

Mayors and other senior representatives from numerous cities and municipalities – including Athens, Dikili, Idomeni, Samos, Pozzallo – have gathered to discuss the impact of the agreement on their communities and to share innovative approaches to challenges.

These issues won urgency after the dramatic events in Turkey in the recent days. It remains in this very moment not only "the question, if that would also make the refugees agreement irrelevant", Hannes Swoboda says, Host of the Conference and Former Member of the European Parliament. "But it may easily be, that the Europeans will soon receive refugees from Turkey especially."

Main elements of the agreement are until now not realized, especially the resettlement of refugees directly from Turkey to Europe, Gerald Knaus from the European Stability Initiative pointed out. In fact, refugees "are trapped" in Greece, both on the islands and on the mainland. The EU is in no way prepared for the necessary resettlement, "neither politically nor organisational."

Xanthoula Soupli, President of the Municipality of Idomeni, commented: "Throughout months, with the large number of refugees and immigrants, the problems we faced on a daily basis were huge. We could not resolve all of them, we are a small border village, there was no infrastructure nor could we provide the right living conditions; meanwhile, the state was absent. These people are not animals, numbers, they have real needs."

Luigi Ammatuna, Mayor of Pozzallo, Sicily, adds: "At times, we feel alone, Rome seems far away, Brussels extremely far away. Despite this, we continue to receive these people and do our duty to receive them; the citizens of Pozzallo have remained the same and have been welcoming."



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Michalis Angelopoulos, the Mayor of Samos, reports: "Today, incoming tourism, the only sustainable "product" of our island, is down by 40 Percent. Based on recent developments in Turkey, we may even have new categories of refugees. We are the exterior border of Europe, let's not forget that!"

"The EU-Turkey agreement puts an enormous burden on the shoulders of municipalities in border regions – a burden that has pushed many of them to breaking point", Patricia Kahane pointed out. Ms Kahane is President of the Karl Kahane Foundation and co-founder of Act.Now, the Austria-based private organisation that is holding the conference.

Kahane said: "We have run out of time waiting for a grand solution, so we have to start solving problems step by step from the ground up, beginning with increased support for municipalities. The EU-Turkey agreement already is a positive effort to stop the humanitarian catastrophe in the Aegean Sea. And now we have to prevent a social catastrophe in the border regions, as these municipalities are currently a blind spot for supranational political bodies."

One objective of the conference is therefore to send a clear message to EU-level policymakers regarding the support that affected municipalities require, ranging from logistical support to additional funding and practical assistance.

André Heller, media artist and co-founder of Act.Now, praised the attendants "who have come together seeking plausible answers to highly complex questions and viable solutions for problems appearing gigantic."

### **About Act.Now**

The first N-O-W International Mayors' Conference was held in January 2016 in Vienna. At that gathering, mayors from local authorities along refugee routes (in the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Austria and Germany), representatives of NGOs and people who had been forced to flee their homeland met for the first time to discuss practical solutions at local levels. Act.Now was founded by Austrian Artist André Heller, the President of the Karl Kahane Foundation, Patricia Kahane, and entrepreneur Elke Zuckermann, and is based in Vienna, Austria.

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