



Project proposal

transit center "*Proti Stassi*" ("First Station") Refugee aid in Molyvos/Island Lesbos, Greece

1. General Situation:

For years, the island of Lesbos in the north-eastern Aegean region has been the destination for refugees whom embark in boats from the Turkish coast in search of safety and help in Europe.

As a direct consequence of the continuing war in Syria and Iraq, the number of refugees reaching Lesbos in this way has drastically increased over the last year. Neither the local authorities nor the civil population will be able to cope with this ongoing crisis without international assistance. The state-run facilities for the admission of those arriving in Moria and Mytilini ("Kara Tepe") are at breaking point due to massive over-crowding.

Along the Eastern coast of Lesbos, collectives of refugees are heading on foot towards the capital because the previously supplied police buses are no longer running. Men, women the elderly and children are lying exhausted by the roadside or huddled together under the shade of trees to escape the blazing sun. There is no governmental provision of water, food or other relief items.

The objective of those, whom are often walking without shoes, is to register with the police in order to be allowed to board a ferry to Athens from the harbour in Mytilini. However, sometimes only 150-200 refugees are allowed on each ferry after having registered with the local police.

The situation on the island is intensifying on a daily basis (due to the growing number of refugees arriving) not only for the refugees but also for those supporting them. The far-reaching social crisis which has affected all of Greece in recent years, is further severely limiting the margins for refugee aid. Swift support from the outside is needed urgently. It is also essential to create/support solidarity with the local residents whom, in spite of seeing their own economic situation more and more threatened, strive to uphold basic humanitarian values.

2. Situation in Molyvos (Mithymna):

The beaches of Molyvos, Eftalou and the more southern fishing harbour of Skala Sykaminea are among the preferred destinations for refugee boats because there, the distance to the Turkish coast is only a few kilometres.

In the island's touristic centre in the north (approximately 75 kilometres from the capital Mytilini) many private initiatives have formed over the years which admirably showed solidarity with the refugees arriving.

Citizens of Molyvos – natives as well as expatriates collect and distribute food, water, clothing, diapers and blankets for those arriving, who often leave the boats completely soaked and exhausted. The state on the other hand is providing little to no support. Even the daily bus, with which the police were supposed to transport refugees for the registration in Moria, is being cancelled more and more often because the institutions in the capital are in increasingly chaotic states.

Private aid with transport however is prohibited and could lead to 10 years in prison according to current human trafficking laws. The desperate therefore head south on foot on the long and dangerous journey. It seems to be only a matter of time before the first death occurs due to a traffic accident, dehydration or complete fatigue.

The Current gathering point for those arriving in Molyvos is the bus stop at the entrance to town, where neither sufficient space nor sanitary facilities are provided. Up to 400 people already receive provisional help here every day. The private resources of the supporters are just as exhausted as the helpers themselves, many of whom, volunteer to welcome and care for refugees from early morning till late at night alongside their jobs in the tourism sector.

Additionally, tensions are rising because it is feared that the large number of arriving refugees could damage the by far most important source of income for the town which is Tourism. Rumours of complaints by paying customers and also cancellations of holiday bookings are rife, in an insecure and over strained population.

The goal of this project proposal therefore, is to build a sustainable structure together with local initiatives to offer a viable alternative for those arriving as well as for the helpers, in order to ensure an acceptable and humane management of the situation over the coming months.

3. “Proti Stassi” (“ First Station”)

3.1. Premises:

Luckily, Molyvos has a space which offers ideal conditions for temporarily hosting refugees – The camping ground of the town, on the road to Eftalou which has been abandoned for the past 2 years.

This area is completely fenced in and has been generously planted with palms and broad leaved trees, which should keep temperatures at a bearable level, even in the expected heat of mid-summer.

There is a reception building at the entrance, which has electricity, telephone and internet connection. Behind this, is an even, open space of approximately 400 square metres which is suitable for erection of large tents.

The spacious premises have modern, masonry sanitary facilities (buildings with showers/wc for men and women), solar panels, a large outside kitchen, and roofed common areas. Amenities for washing clothes/ blankets are on site. Even the former camping ground's furniture (wooden benches and tables) are available and can be used immediately. Originally, the facilities were built for 150 tourists with their own campers or tents.

Because the refugees would only stay temporarily and provisional sleeping areas outside among trees and bushes are sufficient during the warmer months, it stands to reason that these premises would suffice for the expected challenges of the coming months.

All electric and water installations appear to be largely intact. The time needed for getting the old camping ground operational would only be a few days according to the former Mayor, Dimitris Vatis. The district government in Mytilini has approved the use of the camping ground for refugees on June 7th 2015.

This decision is however viewed with scepticism by the local community. It is feared that a permanent refugee camp would be established in Molyvos, which would have a negative effect on tourism in the area. Another concern is that the carefully built camping ground might be damaged when used as a transitional centre.

Some convincing will have to be done, as well as managing “Proti Stassi” professionally from the start to defuse the concerns.

3.2. Project Goals:

The refugees immediately need a place where they can:

- Wash themselves and rest undisturbed.
- Get provisions (food, drink).
- Get adequate clothing.
- Get medical attention where needed.
- Receive general information on the country and the people.
- Receive information on their legal situation.
- Prepare for the onward journey.

The local initiatives, which so far have organised and executed the care of those arriving privately, as well as the municipality of Molyvos, should be supported in offering refugees appropriate first care.

The complex needs of the tourism industry should also be taken into account in order to minimise interruptions to normal service.

Even though the problem of the rising numbers of refugees will of course not be solved by such project as “Proti Stassi” (it could only be helped by political re-thinking on EU level), it would be a token of how local population with international support can answer the crisis faced by the desperate at EU’s external borders in a humane and compassionate way.

It is therefore essential to:

- Respect the dignity of the refugees.
- Include the local initiatives from the start.
- Involve all citizens in the planning phase.
- Be transparent towards the local authorities throughout the whole process.

3.3. Division of Tasks:

As soon as the owner has prepared the premises (mowing, getting electric/water installations operational, and cleaning of the buildings), the local initiatives can start using the camping ground instead of the bus stop as Proti Stassi.

The responsibility for the adherence to all relevant regulations for the building and the grounds (insurance/ fire safety etc...) remains with the authorising agency which is also the formal funding body of the project.

“borderline europe” offers its expertise and support in particular in the following fields:

- Logistics (vehicles, communication)
- Acquisition of relief supplies (tents, mats etc)
- Medical support
- Recruitment of project helpers/volunteers
- Allocation of interpreters
- Creation of information material
- Networking with other relief organisations
- International fundraising

In no case should the existing initiatives be bypassed.

At the same time the relevant authorities should not be relieved of their responsibilities (however difficult their situation might be). In particular the question of orderly onward transport must be addressed by them.

It is therefore crucial, that the citizens of Molyvos be involved as much as possible and that the district government in Mytilini give their official consent to this project.

3.4. Time plan:

It is intended to found “Borderline Lesvos” as an association with local activists as soon as possible, whom can lead the project in the future. To that end, an open council will be held in Molivos in June 2015, where the project can be introduced and discussed.

The project “Proti Stassi” can then be implemented from the beginning of July 2015, with the allocation of initial staff.

By the beginning of August 2015 “Borderline Europe” can be fully operational.

At this time the project is planned to run up until the end of 2015, with the possibility of extending this time frame according to needs.

4. Conclusion:

Europe must no longer sit back and do nothing about the prolonged humanitarian crisis on the Greek Aegean Island.

It is shameful how little solidarity and support the Greek government and people are receiving from the European Union and its member states.

“Proti Stassi” embodies an attempt at offering concrete answers at the local level, to the catastrophic effects of the failed EU refugee and border politics.

We are counting on the civil population of the rich countries in the north of Europe- also those countries from which most tourists originate, to show more solidarity than their governments.

“Proti Stassi” is the project of the people!

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Harald Glöde, Chairman
"borderline europe - human rights without borders"

Gneisenastr. 2
D-10961 Berlin

Tel./Fax: +49 (0) 176-42 02 76 55

Skype: [borderline-europe](#)

Mail: mail@borderline-europe.de

Site: www.borderline-europe.de