

Honourary Ambassador, distinguished guests, dear colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I am here today, at the Reception Centre for Applicants for International Protection 'Limnes', where we experience the true meaning of solidarity which goes beyond words and put into practice.

One year ago, when we started discussing the European Pact on Migration and Asylum and the need for true and mandatory solidarity towards the front-line Member States, Poland, through its ambassador and dear friend, Mrs Irena Lichnerowicz Augustyn, came forward and put in practice the theory behind the script. For us, this is the true meaning of solidarity in an extremely challenging period, with the irregular migration flows continuing at the same pace, stretching to its limits the already overburdened asylum and reception system in Cyprus.

As you know, over the past 4 years, Cyprus has been the Member State with the highest number of first-time applications for international protection in relation to its population size. Moreover, the proportion of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in Cyprus corresponds to 4% of the country's population.

Unfortunately, during the first months of 2021, the increasing irregular arrivals especially of Syrian nationals, either by sea or by land through the Green Line, indicate an alarming trend. The continuation of the large numbers of migration flows from Turkey is the main challenge for Cyprus. More than 70% of applicants for international protection in Cyprus come directly from Turkey, or through the areas which are not under the effective control of the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

This is why persistently we are asking the EU to develop and implement a legally robust operation dedicated to the prevention of irregular migratory flows from Turkey

before they reach Cyprus equivalently to the arrangement for Greece in the EU – Turkey Statement of 2016.

Despite the enormous efforts taken by the Cypriot authorities in order to manage the disproportionate migratory pressures, we are still in an extremely difficult situation mainly because of the particularities that we face, such as the division of the island by a 180-kilometre-long ceasefire line, that creates unique conditions for the development of irregular migration.

In the framework of the measures adopted by the Government to efficiently manage these flows, we decided to establish this new centre in the area of 'Limnes', for those applicants whose application for asylum is examined under the accelerated process and consequently enter the return procedure. For this purpose and for the effective implementation of returns, a pre-departure centre for those applicants whose asylum claim is rejected, will soon be established next to the Reception Centre.

The effective implementation of returns is of particular importance for Cyprus and this is the reason why we insist that the European Commission should proceed with centrally oriented agreements with third countries. It has also been our firm position, that Member States should demonstrate solidarity to the front-line Member States who are the border-guards of the EU.

This is why I wish to express once more my gratitude to the Polish Government and the Polish Embassy here in Cyprus, for donating 80 housing units for the needs of our new Reception Centre and hence putting solidarity into practice. Concluding, I envisage the strengthening of the existing bonds of friendship and cooperation between our countries so that we will reach tangible results in our common areas of concern in the near future.

Thank you very much.