

Greece plans to install floating fence to block migrants



Athens, January 31 (RHC)-- Greece is planning to install a floating fence on the Aegean Sea to block migrants from reaching its islands' shores through Turkey. According to Greek government officials, Athens wants to build a 2.7-kilometer-long net-like barrier near the island of Lesbos, where the overcrowded Moria camp operates.

This floating fence will rise 50 centimeters above sea level and carry light marks that will make it visible at night, a government document inviting vendors to submit offers said, adding that it was “aimed at containing the increasing inflows of migrants”.

“The invitation for floating barriers is in the right direction,” Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos told Skai Radio. “We will see what the result, what its effect as a deterrent will be in practice.”

“It will be a natural barrier. If it works like the one in Evros... it can be effective,” he said, referring to a cement and barbed-wire fence Greece set up in 2012 along its northern border with Turkey to stop a rise in migrants crossing there.

Greece served as the gateway to the European Union for more than one million Syrian refugees and other migrants in recent years. While an agreement with Turkey sharply reduced the number attempting the voyage since 2016, Greek islands still struggle with overcrowded camps operating far beyond their

capacity.

Aid groups, which have described the living conditions at migrant camps as appalling, said fences in Europe had not deterred arrivals and that Greece should focus on speeding up the processing of asylum requests instead.

“We see, in recent years, a surge in the number of barriers that are being erected but yet people continue to flee,” Boris Cheshirkov, spokesman in Greece for U.N. refugee agency UNHCR, told Reuters. “Greece has to have fast procedures to ensure that people have access to asylum quickly when they need it.”

Last year, 59,726 migrants and refugees reached Greece's shores according to the UN agency UNHCR. Nearly 80% of them arrived on Chios, Samos and Lesbos.

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