

# **The Weaponization of Population Movements on the Greek Turkish Borderzone**

**The use of refugees by European actors to confirm and transcend  
borders with the use of coercive engineered migration.**

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s1057439

Master Thesis

Human Geography

Radboud University

August 2021

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### Abstract

In recent years, the so-called *migration crisis* has been at the forefront of the public consciousness both in individual European states and worldwide. Almost daily the media engages in a bombardment of conflicting narratives surrounding the apparent influx of irregular migrants from afar. The media's framing of the topic is varied, and it is a contentious issue both on a local and international level. Often the human cost of this *crisis* is disregarded in favour of stories that contain either concealed or blatant Islamophobia and xenophobia. Stories of refugee flows *attacking* Europe have become a common narrative of the far right. Many authors have sketched the connection between the recent growth of the increasingly radical right-wing political parties and the increase in migration. However, whichever narrative you choose to ascribe to, there is a growing consensus that the European migration policies are woefully inadequate. European nation-states have failed to uphold human rights concerning offering asylum to vulnerable populations. Occasionally the brutal human cost of this migration policy explodes in the media, with horrendous stories of human suffering grabbing the public's attention. Examples of this include the drowning of three-year-old Alan Kurdi in an attempt to reach the shores of Greek/European soil (Gunter, 2015), the burning of camp Moria in September 2020 (Al Jazeera, 2020) and more recently a fire which broke out in former army barracks in the UK which highlighted the dire conditions asylum seekers were being kept in (BBC 2021). This topic is ever-changing and shows no sign of abating since it first made headlines and dominated the public sphere in 2015. The situation has not improved in six years and is worsening due to stricter immigration laws by European actors and an increasingly turbulent and strained relationship with Turkey. Reports of illegal sea pushbacks by Greek authorities and worsening hostilities towards those who are granted asylum in Europe have increased the need to conduct further analysis on the situation. Through further analysis of the contributing factors to this failure, tentative steps can hopefully be made towards a more humane migration policy. There are many different contributing factors to this situation that cannot possibly fit into a thesis, therefore, this thesis

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shall focus on one small aspect. This thesis shall therefore explore how the borders of Europe are transformed and confirmed with refugees with the use of coercive engineered migration.

## **Preface**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the many thousands of people who are forced to survive in the inhumane conditions forced upon them by an inadequate and insufficient migratory policy imposed by European actors.

I would also like to thank the residents of the Vathy Reception Centre who allowed me to work alongside the community and gain a deeper knowledge of the realities of the European migration policies. Also, the members of the Movement on the Ground Team who facilitated the work I undertook during my time in Samos. The members of the various legal centres who graciously provided information seminars on the legal procedures of applying for asylum within Europe.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to the innumerable people who have not been so lucky as those who have managed to gain access to European territory. To the potential thousands of people who are denied their right to even apply for asylum and to those who are brutally and inhumanely pushed back by the Hellenic Coast Guard and Frontex, whose operations and actions traumatise already severely vulnerable people and violate the main ethos under which the European Union was created.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Olivier Kramsch who supported my study each step of the way, especially for showing support and understanding during difficult decisions I had to make during my internship. Finally, I would like to thank the lecturers and professors at the Human Geography Department at Nijmegen who provided me with an invaluable learning experience. With special thank you to Henk Van Houtum and Rodrigo Bueno Lacey whose course on the Geopolitics of Borders, reaffirmed my passion to study the developments with regards to displaced peoples in Europe, especially focusing on the Aegean Islands.

## **Glossary**

MOTG- Movement on the Ground

NFI- Non-Food Items

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

IOM- United Nations Migration Agency

UN- United Nation

UNHCR-United Nations Refugee Agency

RIC-Reception and Identification Centre

MPRIC- Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centres

MSF- Medecins Sans Frontiers

HCG- Hellenic Coast Guard

### A Key for Terminology

During my masters, I undertook a course on the Geopolitics of Borders, in which the impact of cartography and language was discussed, especially with regards to the effect this can have on the public consciousness on a certain topic/situation. This can be seen in the giant red arrows as mentioned by Van Houtum and Bueno Lacey which are prevalent in Frontex maps, displaying irregular migration entering Europe. In this example, the goal of these maps is clear; to incite a feeling of being under attack and to justify the inhumane border practices being undertaken on the borders of Europe (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2019).

This is also prevalent in the language that is used to describe the situation surrounding displaced peoples within Europe. Therefore, a conscious effort shall be made in this thesis to avoid such language and thus the negative connotation which it is inevitably associated with. Below I will explain the terminology used.

**Resident-** This phrase is used in particular with NGOs in exchange for the word refugee. The word refugee has always held certain negative connotations in society, but this has worsened in recent years with the increase in the number of displaced peoples entering Europe. Therefore, the word resident (as a resident of the camp) is used in place of “refugee”.

**Outskirts-** The word outskirts is used to describe the area in which people reside outside the official campgrounds. During the increased number of arrivals on the shores of Europe from 2015 onwards, the reception facilities which had been built were grossly inadequate and too small to host the growing number of people. Therefore, with few other options, people resorted to camping in the surrounding area. As the asylum procedure is notoriously long, over time people began constructing their own shelters from pallets, planks of wood and tarp provided by various organisations. In some circles, these areas of informal camps are referred to as *jungles*. However, this is an outdated term that has negative connotations which denote wilderness and uncivilised *natives*. Therefore, this area shall be referred to as the outskirts.

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**Structure-** The use of the word structure is also a phrase that is widely used within NGOs on Samos. Structures refer to the tents in which people reside. There is a conscious effort not to refer to structures as homes or houses, as they are neither of these things and to refer to them as such would imply that they are adequate living conditions.



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## **1. Introduction**

At present, there are thousands of people being forced to exist in inhumane conditions in formal and informal camps along the Greek coast. In addition to the woeful living conditions, the mental health of those who are forced to survive in a constant state of uncertainty is dire as they are subjected to asylum decisions which at times seem illogical. They are forced to live with the ever-present threat of deportation. Worse than this still there exists a large swathe of people who have not made it this far. They have been refused entry to Europe illegally by European Actors. Although it has yet to be publicly acknowledged by the perpetrators, many credible reports and articles are being published by reliable sources, as to this gross violation of human rights known as pushbacks. This situation is the human cost of using people as a means of intimidation and as a political tool by states. The impact of these conditions on people's well-being cannot be understated. This impact has been discussed in various reports published by humanitarian actors on the so-called silent crisis of the mental health impact of these living conditions.

The Greek Island of Samos is an area that highlights these issues very visibly. The Vathy Reception Centre, in which I conducted my internship, was grossly overcrowded upon my arrival on the island. However, as shall be discussed further on, the population drastically decreased in the five months I spent on the island. The inadequate living conditions in which people are forced to live for an indefinite amount of time are accentuated by the lack of access to a steady electricity supply, running water or official hygiene facilities, for those who reside in the outskirts. Within the official camp, conditions are marginally better, although there is access to relatively stable structures in the form of prefabricated containers, these have been grossly overcrowded in the past. This overcrowding has resulted in dangerous conditions, due to the omnipresent risk of fire, which routinely ravages through refugee camps in the Aegean Sea.

This thesis will explore how populations are being utilised by state actors as a political tool to transcend and confirm borders. This is a highly contentious topic that is discussed in the media daily with news of Turkish and Greek/ European Union tensions erupting every few

months, with brash statements by various state heads such as Erdogan and Macron making headlines worldwide. However, what is regularly overlooked in these headlines and articles is the impact on those who are forced to survive in the consequences of these actions. There are thousands of people forced to survive within uncertainty living in deplorable conditions as a result of the actions of state heads.

Considering the recent mass movement of Afghan nationals fleeing the Taliban, it would appear that the importance of studying population movements and the transcendence and confirmation of European borders is growing in societal relevance (Atuhaire, 2021). The need to conduct further analysis of the EU's treatment of asylum seekers and the bordering practices in place has therefore grown in importance. The study of borders and bordering mechanisms has societal relevance as the issues surrounding migration are constantly in the public sphere. Due to the lack of a coherent and humane border policy by the EU, there is deep unrest amongst member states and within individual member states. These issues are vigorously debated in the media with opposing sides often clashing. This is not purely an issue that is debated in the higher echelons of society, although it does occupy the forefront of many political debates and news reports. The manifestation of this conflict can be seen in the everyday debates of European citizens. This conflict often has physical manifestations in the form of protests between anti-immigration and pro-immigration groups, in which violent outbreaks are not unusual (Perrigo, 2018). Furthermore, the perhaps most shocking and brutal manifestation of this conflict can be seen in the widespread police brutality against asylum seekers, which has been reported by many sources. This violence has been reported by many NGOs and has even produced organisations that solely are engaged in reporting this. Border Violence Monitoring Network is an example of this, their stated goal is to "*Document illegal push-backs and police violence inflicted by EU member state authorities*" (BVMN, 2021).

This conflict presented both in debates and in their physical manifestation, highlight the underlying uneasy relationship European member states have with their stated philosophy and the actual reality and implementation of their policies. This issue has far-reaching consequences from the increasing far-right attacks, the rise of populism within the EU and the normalisation of far-right rhetoric being used by European politicians (the infamous *act normal or go away* statement by Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte) (Taylor, 2017). This has

resulted in increased Islamophobic, racist and xenophobic attitudes and incidents within the European Union. Many authors have sketched the connection between the increased far-right rhetoric and increasing hostilities towards the perceived *others* and have highlighted how this narrative is becoming commonplace. The increasing *us versus them* narrative has increased the border control mechanisms surrounding Europe. This logic has resulted in a justification for strict and cruel border management. As highlighted by Bueno Lacey and Van Houtum, the EU's border is now the most dangerous in the world (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020). This thesis will attempt to contribute in a small manner to understand how the EU has justified this dangerous border policy with the use of the weaponization of refugees which in turn reinforces the concept of a fortress Europe.

The scientific relevance of researching this field lies in the fact that through a further scientific examination of this topic, it can be possible to apply this knowledge in the real world. It is through this process of gaining scientific knowledge and its subsequent application that basic human needs can hopefully be met and improved. The examination of borders has grown in popularity in recent years with an increased interest in the decentralisation of the border and of bordering mechanisms. Various authors have published extensive writings on the topic of migration, irregular migratory routes in a European context and the issues surrounding integration following the settlement of migrants within Europe. Of the more controversial authors is Paul Scheffer. In his controversial book, *Immigrant Nations* Scheffer introduces the concept that there is not enough pressure on migrants to integrate into European society. This is what he sees as one of the root causes of the conflicts which have emerged from migration, and he advocates for a *one-way street* approach to migration in which the state bears no responsibility for integration (Scheffer, 2011). In alignment with this view, some authors sketch the connection between refugee migration and the spread of violence. In particular, Salehyan and Gleditsch draw connections between the spread of refugees and the spread of violence in which they focus on aspects such as “warrior refugee groups” and the disruption of an ethnic balance in the hosting country (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006).

However, several authors have taken another perspective on the matter and have focused on how the European Union have used their borders to justify human rights abuses

and how displaced people are being utilised by actors to reinforce these borders. Amongst these authors are Bueno Lacy, Van Houtum and Greenhill, whose frameworks shall be a central part of this study. The need to conduct further scientific study on this lies in the fact that borders and the adjoining bordering mechanisms are in a constant state of flux. As there are constant developments within this field, there is a prevailing need to conduct further scientific research to gain a deeper understanding to contribute in a meaningful way to the situation.

The central research question of this study shall therefore be: Are European actors utilising the movement of refugee populations to confirm and transcend borders with the use of coercive engineered migration? If this is shown to be true, this study shall also attempt to answer; what bordering mechanisms are being utilised to enforce this? And what are the direct consequences of these actions?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, I shall outline the theories which shall be utilised to explore how borders are being transformed and confirmed by European actors with the use of coercive engineered migration. Firstly, an examination of the concept of a border shall be given, with particular attention being given as to what is meant by a border in the context of this study, as this is a much-contested concept. Thereafter, a wider explanation of the so-called *migration crisis* and Greece shall be examined. This study shall focus heavily on Samos as it was my research location and the region in which I conducted my internship. However, an explanation as to the wider context with regards to Greece is important as it provides vital background information. Following this, I shall give an in-depth understanding of what is meant by coercive engineered migration as Greenhill explains in her book and subsequent papers to understand the central argument of this thesis. In addition, the papers of Topak, Van Houtum and Beuno Lacey shall be examined to give a deeper understanding of the various elements which are fundamental to the ongoing situation. Finally, an outline of the overall structure of this paper shall be discussed.

### 2.1 Borders

As the concept of borders is a fundamental element of this thesis, an explanation shall be given as to what a *border* means in this context. The concept of borders has much been discussed in recent literature with the definition of a *border* expanding and fluctuating over time. The notion that borders “*only come into existence with nation-states*” is provided to us by Anthony Giddens and is a much-revered concept (Anderson, 1991). However, the notion of a border as a fixed-line and as homogenous that differentiates on a physical level between nation-states has been challenged in recent years. This definition is no longer deemed sufficient to explain the complex and ever-changing notion of borders.

Borders in the modern concept can be deemed both visible and invisible, a highly political concept and a product of human construction. Van Houtum and Van Naerssen provide us with the notion of borders as innately *othering* or exclusionary by nature as by



containing a certain group of people they concurrently exclude another separate group (Van Houtum, 2002). The contradiction that lies in the definition of a border is that it contains a certain group or community, but it is through this process that another selection of people are simultaneously excluded, which is the process by which the *other* is created.

The processes and mechanisms which shall be discussed in this study shall highlight how borders are concepts that are constantly surrounding us and mutating depending on the current situation. It is through these processes that the borders of Europe are being confirmed and transcended, and in this particular case, it is done with the use of refugees.

The definition of a border in this thesis shall be an accumulation of these concepts, in the sense that it shall be understood that a border is indeed a line of sorts that divides territories. However, this definition is lacking in the sense that it does not consider the complex and expanding notions of bordering and thus this theoretical framework shall delve further into the fluctuating and ever-changing concept of a *border*, and therefore *bordering*. The concept of bordering and of a borderzone shall be discussed in further detail in the section on Topaks paper.

## 2.2 Greece, Turkey and the Refugee Crisis

Since 2015, the so-called *migration crisis* came to the forefront of the public consciousness both within and outside of Europe. With the use of maps and images shown by various European organisations such as Frontex and much of the mainstream media, there has been a moral panic of sorts and a deep divide amongst the population of Europe. This schism of pro and anti-refugee has divided states on a European level but has also created a deep divide amongst states themselves with protesters regularly clashing on the topic, especially in the states which are at the forefront of the so-called crisis, such as Greece and Italy.

Since 2015 Greece has been one of the main ports of entry for displaced peoples who are attempting to seek asylum within Europe. Due to the proximity of Turkey, it became the main sea entrance to Europe. This is shown in the proximity of Samos to Turkey, as it is the nearest inhabited island to the Turkish mainland. There exists a distance of less than two kilometres between the two nations. Therefore, many people make the journey across the Mycale strait to claim asylum in Europe. However, during my time on Samos from April to

August 2021, there were very few official entries into Europe by this route. The reasons for this shall be discussed in detail further on, but the main contributing factors include the tightening of border controls due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the alleged pushbacks by authorities. These alleged pushbacks have been documented primarily by the NGO the Aegean Boat Report, in which they have deemed the practice of pushbacks as systematic, which has also been alleged by an Amnesty International Report (Amnesty International, 2021). However, this has not been admitted by authorities as pushbacks remain illegal under international law, which shall be discussed in more detail further into this thesis.

As Greece is a common entry point for those fleeing their home countries due to its proximity to Turkey, there are five islands on which most asylum seekers arrive, which act as a border to entry to Europe. These islands are Samos, Lesbos, Chios, Leros and Kos. The majority of those who arrive in Europe through this route from Turkey have arrived in the past two years, including most of the residents of the Vathy RIC, in which I conducted my internship. The lack of new arrivals has been attributed to increasingly strict border controls and alleged sea pushbacks. This is highlighted in the reports published by the Aegean Boat Report, in June 2019 they reported 3167 new arrivals into the Greek islands which is in comparison to a mere 97 in 2021 (Aegean Boat Report, 2021). The last arrivals have often arrived on plastic dinghies which are filled over capacity. Being forced to take this route often means that people have been forced to pay money to extortionists and have gone through traumatic experiences which had brought them to Turkey (SV, 2021).

Due to various developments which shall be discussed further in this thesis, Greece has been placed under an unfair burden by the EU as it became the main entry point for the vast majority of irregular migration into Europe. This coupled with the EU Turkey deal of 2016 and the Dublin Regulation, which shall be discussed further on, meant that Greece has become the reception area for increased irregular migration into Europe. This burden has been exacerbated by the fact that Greece has not yet recovered from one of the worst economic crises the country has ever seen. While still reeling from the intense budget cuts placed upon the country's infrastructure by the IMF, Greece was tasked with hosting an increased number of asylum seekers (Alogoskoufis, 2021). In this climate of austerity and

being essentially neglected by the rest of the EU, growing hostility from the Greek public began towards asylum seekers. This manifested itself in increased support for right-wing and anti-migratory political parties, with the infamous fascist party of Golden Dawn gaining much support in the past fifteen years. Although the party has been all but decimated in the recent elections due to convictions of murder and running a criminal organisation, it does not negate that it gained widespread support from the public in the past ten years (Trilling, 2020).

Therefore, the inhumane bordering practises in Greece which shall be discussed in further detail below, are by no means justified. However, they are equally not as a mere result of simple xenophobia and racism, but a result of a complex series of events that resulted in the failure of the wider European Union to support Greece, and as a result the disregarding of the vast failures to protect the Human Rights in the outermost parts of the European Union.

### 2.3 Coercive Engineered Migration

A central framework that shall be utilised in this study is that of *Coercive Engineered Migration*, a concept which was developed by Kelly Greenhill in her book *Weapons of Mass Migration*. In this paper, Greenhill sketches the notion that refugees have up until recently been regarded as merely a by-product of war. However, in recent years, international relations scholars have become more aware of the coercive nature of migration movements being utilised as weapons, which Greenhill expands upon in her book.

The definition of coercion which is provided to us is:

*“Generally understood to refer to the practice of inducing or preventing changes in political behaviour through the use of threats, intimidation or some other form of pressure—most commonly, military force”* (Greenhill, 2016).

Through this understanding of coercion, the practice of CEM can be understood, by extension as the use of population movements, generally, a refugee population, which has either been intentionally created or merely manipulated and forcibly moved across a border to induce concessions from a state(s) by the perpetrating actor(s). The desired concessions are usually either military, political or economic in nature.

Greenhill categorises the three types of actors which engage in CEM and define them as follows:

*“Generators ... directly create or threaten to create cross-border population movements unless targets concede to their demands. Agent provocateurs, ... in contrast, do not create crises directly but rather deliberately act in ways designed to incite the generation of outflows by others. Opportunists ... play no direct role in the creation of migration crises but simply exploit the existence of outflows generated or catalysed by others. Opportunists might threaten to close their borders and thereby create humanitarian emergencies unless targets take desired actions and/or proffer side-payments”* (Greenhill, 2016).

She categorises former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as generators because they both threatened or did create large population movements to forcibly move across borders to manipulate state(s) into ceding to their demands. An example of agent provocateurs is given as the Kosovo Liberation Army in the 1990s when they provoked attacks by the Serbian military against Kosovar Albanians.

Finally, an example of opportunist's is given as Turkey in 2015/2016. This is the basis for Greenhill's 2016 paper in which she applies the CEM framework to this Deal. Opportunists can threaten to close the border encompassing their territory to incite humanitarian disasters or offer to welcome population movements in exchange for incentives, either financial or political. This particular case shall be examined in further detail below.

In her book, she highlights 56 times in which refugees were weaponized by actors in negotiations since 1951. Greenhill concluded that 60% of CEM cases included political objectives, 50% economic and 30% military, with many cases encompassing multiple objectives. The two methods under which CEM can be enacted can occur simultaneously. They are defined as “capacity swamping” and “political agitating” by Greenhill. Capacity swamping is focused on the ability of the target state to host the population movement in question, whereas political agitating focuses on the states willingness to do so (Greenhill, 2016). In the economic south, cases with CEM generally focuses on the ability of the state to

host the population movement, i.e., capacity swamping. In the *so-called* global north, it is more common for both agitating and swamping to occur simultaneously in cases of CEM. The perpetrators of CEM within the Global North generally focuses on the exploitation of the heterogeneity of the target state(s).

Greenhills 2016 paper, “*Open Arms Behind Barred Doors; Fear, Hypocrisy and Policy Schizophrenia in the European Migration Crisis*” alludes to the mixed or in her words “schizophrenic” reaction of the EU to the increase of irregular migration, following 2015. She attributes much of this reaction to the fact that the EU is a collection of various states with different and often conflicting approaches to the situation. She uses the German *open-door policy* versus the Hungarian policy of erecting a physical barriers to migration, in the form of walls, to highlight this. The growth of a pro-and anti-migration schism within the European Union population and between state heads made the EU vulnerable to negotiate a deal that had previously been deemed “blackmail” and “outrageous” with the Turkish state (Greenhill,2016).

In this paper, she defines Turkey as an opportunist actor engaging in CEM. She demonstrates this by showing how Turkey had taken no direct action in the creation of the increased migration into Europe in 2015 but manipulated this with the threat to open or close borders to incentivise the targets(the EU) to cede to their goals.

In the context of the EU Turkey Deal, the EU found itself negotiating with a state which it had refused entry into the European Union since 1987. In this analysis, she highlights how the heterogeneity of the EU was a factor that made it vulnerable to Turkish influence. She shows how the aforementioned diverse opinions on migration by different member states, Hungary and Germany for example, generated unrest within the EU and in part allowed for the growth of the far-right within European boundaries (Greenhill,2016). Turkey benefitted from these negotiations positively and thus had succeeded in its efforts of CEM with the EU. However, since the publication of this paper the relationship between the EU and Turkey has deteriorated significantly and thus an expansion on this original analysis of the situation shall be given. Turkey can no longer be solely held responsible for engaging

in CEM as there is mounting evidence that shows that Greece and the EU is retaliating by also engaging in CEM.

Her dynamic framework, which links migration, power relations and norms, is useful to begin to explore the concept of bordering in the context of European Borders. The central argument of this thesis shall use the framework which Greenhill has explored in her book and apply it to the current situation which exists along the Aegean Sea in between Greece and Turkey.

#### **2.4 Topak: The Biopolitical Border in Practice**

Another framework that shall be utilised in this thesis is that of Topak. In his paper, he explores the movement from a concept of a border to *bordering*. Topak uses the example of the Greek/ Turkish border and examines it as a borderzone, the definition of which is defined as:

*“That while borders are diffusing beyond and inside state territories, their practices and effects are concentrated at the edges of state territories—i.e., borderzones. Borderzones are biopolitical spaces in which surveillance is most intense and migrants suffer the direct threat of death or injury”* (Topak, 2014).

His paper explores the way that borders now move both within and beyond state territories with the use of sophisticated surveillance mechanisms and this is concentrated at borderzones. These are areas in which human rights are disregarded in favour of sovereign practices. Topak relies on the Foucaultian definition of biopolitics in which they are:

*“the product of the historical transition from a sovereign mode of power that exerts control over territory and uses practices of death towards a modern biopolitical one which manages population mainly through pastoral, productive, and delocalized techniques”* (Topak, 2014).

Through the example of Greece and Turkey, Topak highlights how biopolitics is enacted through increasingly advanced surveillance techniques, “*sovereign territorial controls*”, the disregarding of migrant’s rights and the frequency of deaths and exclusion (Topak, 2014). These practices are most visible within the borderzone of Greece and Turkey.

It is through these practices of increasingly advanced surveillance techniques that migrants' lives are held hostage by the EU and Greek officials. In this arena the deaths of those who perish crossing the Aegean are disregarded in favour of the sovereign practises of border control activities. Although Topak acknowledges that it is not the case that the rights of migrants are necessarily respected outside of this borderzone, but he reiterates that the dismissal of migrant's rights is most concentrated in these borderzone areas.

Although Topaks paper is seven years old, at the time of writing, the concepts and arguments which he discusses are important to understand the current situation in the Aegean. Many of the practises and mechanisms that he highlights in his paper have become more intense in the years since its publication. Therefore, his arguments not only still remain valid in today's climate, but perhaps have become more valid and useful to understand the current reality.

## **2.5 Autoimmunity of the EU: Bueno Lacey and Van Houtum**

In addition to this, the concept of the autoimmunity of the EU which is highlighted by Van Houtum and Bueno Lacey shall also be used in this thesis. In their paper, they highlight how the EU border control measures are self-harming in their application. They use the example of three border mechanisms to examine this notion.

The first which they explore in their paper is a paper border. The paper border is implemented with the use of visa requirements which was initiated with the Schengen Agreement. The consequences of visa requirements are that it has prevented access to the EU for vulnerable people, which contradicts its fundamental values of respecting human dignity and human rights. In doing so regular routes to the EU are impossible and thus create the development of irregular routes for those wishing to seek asylum within Europe. The notion of a paper border is an important concept for this study, as it highlights how those who are in most need of protection in the EU are in a situation in which they cannot access European Territory regularly. It is through this paper border that the growth of irregular migration and thus the various mechanisms, such as the criminalisation of seeking asylum and the use of pushbacks (both of which shall be discussed) have become prolific.

The iron gate is the second border mechanism that they explore in their paper. This consists of the physical manifestation of gates, fences and physical border controls (Frontex for example). This has the result of giving the impression of protecting European citizens from an outside threat which in turn reinforces the narrative of threatening dangerous migrants. Growing xenophobia, islamophobia and increased support for radical right-wing organisations can be in part attributed to this. Another example is the outsourcing of border controls to third parties. In doing, the EU has less control of the border and cannot influence the human rights breaches which occur at these locations. Therefore, the EU is making itself culpable for these without having direct control and thus is harming itself. Many of these *iron gate* border mechanisms shall be discussed in this study, with particular attention being paid to the operation of the organisation Frontex and their involvement in the implementation of the iron gate .

The third border mechanism is that of the border camp which can be found on many islands of Greece such as Samos and Lesbos and in an informal manner in the the former “Jungle” in Calais, France. This is a further *othering* process in which

*“refugees are caged yet exposed to the camera at all times, a spatial confirmation of their social undesirability... and contributes to consolidate the already abundant disdain or plain fear for refugees in the EU”* (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020).

As I conducted my internship within a border camp on the island of Samos, this mechanism shall be discussed in detail in this study.

## 2.6 Outline

This thesis began with an outline as to the literature and contextual framework which has documented the situation with regards to Turkey and Greece thus far and introduced the various theories and hypotheses which have been sketched out. Following this, the methodological framework shall be discussed, with attention being paid to how I altered by methodology from my initial planning to the actual implementation, due to various constraints. I shall provide a brief outline of the sources from which I received the majority of my data and a justification as to why I chose these sources. Following this, I shall give a brief



explanation as to the new camp which was being built on Samos during my internship and the ethical questions that resulted from this.

The research location shall then be discussed along with a description of my internship organisation and the projects and teams with which they operate. Following this, I shall begin my data analysis, in which I shall explore the various procedures, legislations and events which are significant to this study. Section six shall discuss the practice of pushbacks including the various types of pushbacks, along with a discussion of the actors which are perpetrating pushbacks. The seventh section shall examine the remaining bordering mechanisms in place including surveillance, the freedom of the press and the criminalisation of seeking asylum. Finally, an alternative to the current system which is in place shall be discussed followed by a conclusion of this thesis along with future outlooks.

Therefore, this thesis shall aim to examine the bordering processes of the borderzone between the EU and Turkey. Attention shall be paid to how the use of irregular migratory routes is used by actors as a weapon. The research question for this thesis shall therefore be: Whether the European Union is using irregular migration as a weapon of *coercive engineered migration* in the borderzone between Greece and Turkey. This shall be shown to be true, through the bordering processes being utilized by the EU and the Greek authorities. This is a topic on which much literature has been written previously. However, as this is also an ever-changing situation, I hope that through my research I can provide an up-to-date analysis of the topic. I hope to answer how European actors are utilising bordering mechanisms (both legal and illegal) to reinforce so-called Fortress Europe. This, I aim to achieve through the vast and informative previous literature which has been published on the topic. In addition to this, having completed my internship with the NGO Movement on the Ground, I shall utilise the data which I collected during my time there to reinforce the arguments made in this study. As the data I was able to collect was somewhat restricted due to Covid 19 it shall be paired with reports which are published by various organizations that provide vital up to date information on what is occurring. Organisations that provide such information include Border Violence Monitoring Network and the Aegean Boat Report amongst others.

Through the data, I collected during my time on Samos and the reports which are published by various actors, I shall show how migratory populations are being used by state actors as a means of intimidation. As this thesis shall show there have previously been papers published on Turkey as an *opportunist* actor engaging in CEM with regards to the 2016 EU Turkey deal, however, this study shall explore the recent developments in the situation and thus make the argument that the EU/ Greece are also engaging in the weaponization of displaced population as a means of political intimidation.

### 3. Methodological Framework

Researching a setting such as the one that exists in Samos is a precarious process. The benefit of researching this particular setting lies in the hope that a deeper understanding of the situation can hopefully lead to better processes and legislations, which would facilitate a more humane border control policy. However, nonetheless, there exists an uneasy element of exploitation in the examination of these processes by interviewing vulnerable populations in a purely academic sense, while they are forced to live with the realities of the situation. Having researched the ethics of conducting research with vulnerable populations, I became aware of the somewhat problematic tendency of paternalism within this field. However, taking into consideration the fact that while this practice of paternalism “*may only serve to further stigmatise, devalue and marginalise groups and individuals already isolated for whatever reason*”, I resolved to not conduct interviews as part of my research process, which I shall account for, further on (Alexander, Pillay & Smith, 2018). This is an element that I did not fully understand during the preparation for my fieldwork. Although I believed I had an understanding of the ethics of researching through my studies, it was not until I started my internship that I began to reconsider my research methods to ensure that I was researching in the most dignified manner possible. In researching vulnerable populations, such as the one in the Vathy Reception centre, there is a power dynamic that must always be acknowledged to ensure that safeguarding is continually prioritised. This coupled with the uncertainty which accompanied the Covid 19 pandemic and developments of the construction of the new camp on Samos, are factors that altered my original methodological framework. To be as transparent as possible I shall outline the procedure under which I altered my methodological framework throughout my researching and writing process in the section below.

#### 3.1 Methodological Tools

After much consideration and discussions with both members of my internship organisation and contacts who engaged in work with the refugee population, I made the conscious decision not to conduct interviews with the displaced community during my time

on Samos. After completing a course on qualitative research methods as part of my degree at Radboud University, I spent much time contemplating conducting interviews during my time on Samos and the ethics related to this activity. I decided to not conduct interviews during my time on Samos as it potentially can have the effect of making people relive the trauma, which they had experienced on their journey to Greece. I decided to instead conduct indirect research which was an extremely useful tool during my time on Samos. By virtue of being on the island of Samos and being in contact with people who are engaged in humanitarian work in this field, I became aware of various developments and occurrences which I otherwise would have been oblivious to. I was extremely lucky and grateful for the opportunity to travel to Greece during this turbulent time, during the Covid 19 pandemic. Along with this, I was extremely lucky to have been eligible for a Covid 19 vaccination during my time on Samos. This was important for the work I was conducting, as I was in contact with an extremely vulnerable population and thus if I had spread the virus amongst the camp residents, it could have had devastating health effects to those who at best have already limited access to healthcare.

I elected not to conduct formal interviews with my colleagues during my time on Samos but rather to engage in indirect research for several reasons. The main reason I elected to engage in indirect research is the fact that many of the developments on Samos were spoken about in a confidential manner. Due to the nature of the situation, many rumours were circulating amongst both the camp and NGO's. This was particularly noticeable with regards to the opening of a new reception centre. The Greek Government had made various promises during 2021, as to when the camp would be opened (Ekathimerini, 2021). There was little in the way of official announcements and the promises as to the opening of the camp changed each month. The latest I had heard was that it was due to be opened at the end of September 2021, which is considerably later than the originally planned opening date of mid-March 2021. Along with this, many of the vital pieces of information to my thesis were in connection with the illegal practices of pushbacks. Although spoken about daily it was always in an informal manner. This was because the Government had introduced stricter measures on the operation of NGOs in Greece in recent years. Therefore, to formally accuse the government of engaging in illegal practices would potentially compromise the operations

of an NGO. This shall be discussed in detail in section six of this paper. There were therefore many *open secrets* during my internship as people were hesitant to outwardly accuse the Greek government or Frontex of pushbacks, as it could have detrimental effects on the organisation they operated with. If it was officially stated by a member of an organisation that the Greek government were engaging in illegal activities such as excessive use of force or pushbacks. The organisations' operations within the reception centre or the outskirts of the camp could easily be rescinded.

It is for this reason that I conducted indirect research through the process of noting events and rumours that appeared important for my research during my internship. Following this, I found reports of these occurrences from official news sources, when possible. Therefore, I noted the rumours and various pieces of information I collected during my indirect research. This allowed me to verify these pieces of information, at a later date, with a reputable source from organisations and newspapers which were willing to publish these claims in a formal setting. It was through this process of noting the various rumours which were circulating and verifying them with various news sources, such as the Aegean Boat Report, international newspapers and local news reports which I was able to conduct my research.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

The various frameworks which have been outlined in the previous section shall be utilised to understand the bordering processes which are being implemented in the border region between Greece and Turkey, and how these bordering processes are being used to enforce CEM and to transcend and confirm the border of Europe. In addition, I shall be utilising the quantitative data which is published by NGOs such as the Aegean Boat Report and the Border Violence Monitoring Network, which record instances of human rights breaches in the form of illegal pushbacks in the Aegean Sea. A brief outline of each of these organisations and the work they conduct shall be given below. This data is significant for this research as the reports of pushbacks have been continually denied by European Actors, this is however disputed by reports by humanitarian actors and is documented in their various reports. This data published by NGOs shall be compared with the policies and statements of

European actors such as Frontex. The differences which were found in analysing this data shall be examined along with how this can be attributed to instances of coercive engineered migration. Therefore, I shall be using quantitative data which is recorded by these various NGOs to support the conclusions drawn from the literature examined in this study. This data shall allow me to gain a greater understanding of the bordering processes which are occurring in the European border regions.

The time frame which I shall use for my thesis shall vary depending on the source in question. Concerning the more technical aspects of my paper, i.e., examining policies and agreements, my time frame shall be broad as it is important to understand the various policies which have been enacted to cause the contemporary situation. However, the quantitative data that I shall be utilising shall begin from 2015, to coincide with the so-called *migration crisis*, up to the present day as reports are published almost weekly by NGOs on the ground.

Through my examination of the literature which has been previously published on the topic, the reports being published by NGOs and through fieldwork I conducted on-site, I shall conclude and provide up-to-date insight into the current bordering processes, which are being enacted in the borderzone between Turkey and Greece.

### **3.3 The Aegean Boat Report**

One of the primary organisations that are providing up to date information on pushbacks along the Greek Coast is the Aegean Boat Report. Founded by a Norwegian man who was volunteering on the island of Lesbos during the initial surge in irregular migration into Greece in the years 2015 and 2016. He discovered a niche in which there was a lack of up to date and centralised information on pushbacks in the Aegean Sea. Upon his arrival back to Norway, he began a network in which it was possible to exchange information for NGO's and volunteers on the unfolding situation. Once the information was gathered a situation report was written on the developments and sent back to the Greek islands. During this period, the information contained in the situation reports was only accessible through involvement with the organisations operating on the Greek islands. However, in December of 2017, it was decided to make this information available to the general public. Therefore, a

public Facebook page was created to allow for an easier exchange of information. The organisation publishes weekly and monthly reports containing information on the number of new arrivals on the Greek islands, the number of people and boats pushed back and an up-to-date estimate on the current population on each of the five islands. Along with this, the organisation publishes photos of the alleged pushbacks which are sent to them by people who have witnessed or been involved in the pushbacks. It is through these methods that the Aegean Boat Report attempts to prove the prevalence of pushbacks and attempts to hold the Greek government accountable for their actions (AegeanBoatReport, 2021).

In late July of 2021, the Greek government began engaging in an attempt to halt the actions of the Aegean Boat Report. A criminal investigation began into the members of the organisation which saw accusations of espionage and the transfer of people illegally over borders (ANSA, 2021). These serious accusations by the Greek government come after several allegations being made by the NGO of pushbacks, along with a recent Amnesty International report on the systematic use of pushbacks as a deterrent to irregular migration. As the situation is ongoing it is impossible to state how it will develop, however, it would appear to be a part of a wider effort by the Greek government to prevent the publication of information on their illegal activities. This thesis will rely heavily on the reports published by the Aegean Boat Report to show how the Greek government is actively engaging in illegal pushbacks to partake in coercive engineered migration against Turkey (HRW, 2021).

### **3.4 Border Violence Monitoring Network**

Another organisation that shall be heavily utilised in this thesis is that of the Border Violence Monitoring Network. Set up similarly to the Aegean Boat Report, the BVMN is an independent network of NGO's and associations who operate in both Greece and the Balkans. They work to monitor the violations of human rights which occur at the external borders of the EU. They also partake heavily in advocacy to prevent violence that is occurring against people on the move. Began in 2016, the network utilises a common framework under which testimonials are taken from those who are the victims of alleged pushbacks and then undertake a fact-checking process. Following this, the incident of violence or the pushback is recorded on their website. They also publish monthly reports on the Balkans along with

special reports on Greece. They provide this and reports of incidents of pushbacks on sea and land which they publish on their website. Their reports shall be used in this thesis to further highlight how the Greek government are engaging in pushbacks as a form of coercive engineered migration (BVMN, 2021).

### 3.5 Choice of Research Location

As will be explored further into this thesis in the section on introducing the research location, I elected to conduct research on the island of Samos for several reasons. As I am primarily researching the border between Greece and Turkey, Samos was an ideal location as it lies incredibly close to Turkey, with the Turkish mainland visible from many sites on the island. This border also functions as a barrier between Europe and the *east* while also highlighting the concept of the *West versus the Rest*. It is along this border that increasing irregular migratory routes have become more common in recent years and therefore the bordering mechanisms enacted by the EU are most acute and visible on this territorial divide.

This allowed for easy visualisation of the relationship between the two states. As their relationship has been historically very fraught, with the states having engaged in four separate wars throughout their history (Jin, 2020). Samos is a very militarized zone that has become more heavily armed in recent years, due to heightened tensions with Turkey. This is not the case exclusively on Samos, as Greece has armed 18 out of 23 islands in the Aegean in the past ten years (Aslan, 2021). The military presence is apparent upon arrival as it is common to witness a convoy of military vehicles patrolling the island. A large number of military personnel on the island is confounded by the fact that military service is mandatory in Greek law, for men for a period of 9 months between the ages of 19 to 45 (Fotiadis, 2021). There also exists a large police presence on Samos which is highly visible and adds to heightened tensions among camp residents and the police.

Along with this, I chose Samos to conduct my research because there was a new reception facility being constructed during my time spent there. This was a highly contentious subject on Samos as various organisations responded differently to this development and it caused much frustration and distress amongst the residents of the camp. The construction of the new camps, not only in Samos but in the wider Greek territory is part of a wider push to



criminalise the act of seeking asylum. This is also implemented through the increase in the surveillance which shall be used in these camps. This shall be examined further in section seven.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations and the “New Camp”**

During the relatively short amount of time that I spent on Samos, there was a massive change underway in the camp. The population of the Vathy RIC had not increased significantly in a long period due to several reasons, including the decrease in the number of new arrivals because of the alleged pushbacks and the increase of the number of open cards allotted to the camp population, which enabled them to leave the islands and travel to the Greek mainland (which will be further explained in the Asylum Procedure section of this paper). As there was a push to open the new camp as soon as possible there was an increasingly large number of transfers taking place from the island, with many people being transferred to the mainland. The new camp was not yet complete but there was mounting pressure on authorities for it to open. Therefore, there was a decision made to open a completed section of the camp before the entire complex was complete. Although this has not yet happened at the time of writing. This section has the capacity to house 1200 people and consequently, the population of the RIC had to decrease to this figure. This resulted in a drastic drop in population during my time in Samos. According to reports, the population declined from over 3155 in April to 875 in July during a period of just three months (AeganBoatReport, 2021). During my internship, we felt this change very drastically in a short amount of time. In the short period which I was in Samos, we noticed a huge decrease in the number of NFI's being distributed, the number of people making use of the shower facilities and the number of empty structures in the camp. This is not just the case in Samos, the population of the five hotspots in Greece have decreased drastically in the past year. As of the end of July 2021 population of the hotspots stood at 6477, which is 7019 under the capacity of 13,496. This is a drastic decrease from the population of 29,579 in July of 2020 (AeganBoatReport, 2021).

The new camp is being constructed in Zervos, by the EU in collaboration with the IOM. During my time working on Samos, there was a transition period underway. Amongst

the various NGO's operating on Samos, there was a sharp divide on the approach to this new camp. The camp is to house 4000 people with a safe area for single women, minors and particularly vulnerable people. There were six people to be housed in each isobox (similar to a prefabricated container) with three bunk beds being placed in each container. There is a stove, a shower and a toilet per isobox<sup>1</sup>. In theory, the new camp appears to offer better living conditions than is presented in the current reception centre and the surrounding outskirts. However, the new camp was situated seven kilometres from the biggest town on Samos, Vathy. The older camp was situated on the hill behind the town of Vathy. It is less than a ten-minute walk to the centre of town. The benefit of having a town near the camp cannot be understated. In practical terms, the proximity of the town to the camp provides a space where products can be accessed easily, at competitive prices as there are several shops available. However, beyond that, the town provides rest bite for those living in the camp. It provides an opportunity to escape the barbed wire and the camp setting. Purchasing a coffee and sitting along the water edge is a common activity by residents of the camp as a means of relaxation and as a distraction from the camp setting

However, the new camp which is being constructed is to be placed seven kilometres outside of Vathy. As the road to Vathy is extremely windy and hazardous, the journey to town by foot will be treacherous and tiring, especially during the soaring summer temperatures which Greece experiences. It will also only be an option for those who are able-bodied enough to complete the trip. For those who are most vulnerable and in need of the facilities which a nearby town such as Vathy provides, the possibility of accessing the town from the new camp by foot is impossible. The new camp shall be under 24-hour surveillance in which residents will have to show ID to enter and shall have to arrive home before a certain time if they are to have night-time access. It is surrounded by vast quantities of barbed wire and situated in a valley. Although unconfirmed as of the time of writing, it has been heavily implied that people who have been issued a second rejection on their asylum decision, shall be housed in a closed area of the camp. This closed area shall be in effect a detention centre in which they shall be confined to the camp and prevented from leaving by

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<sup>1</sup> This is something I observed during a visit to the new camp with my internship organisation, Movement on the Ground

security, until such a time when their deportation shall be arranged. This is a vast difference to the current camp in which entry and exit are mostly not guarded and due to the large outskirts surrounding the camp, there is less feeling of a controlled closed camp environment.

Most if not all NGO's operating on Samos agreed to not work inside the new camp once it is open, as they believed a united front among NGOs send a clear message to the Greek government in opposition to the new camp and to show solidarity with those who are forced to live in these conditions. Although the ultimate goal of preventing the transfer from occurring was unlikely to be achieved, the underlying goal was to show resistance to the transfer and clarify that there is no support amongst NGOs for this type of border management.

On a personal note, I understand the resistance to the new camp, and I believe that it is an inhumane border control mechanism, which treats those who exercise their right to seek asylum as criminals. However, regardless of whether people agree to work in the new camp or not, it is somewhat inevitable that it will be opened, and that people will be forced to reside within it. Once this occurs the people who are unable to make the trip into Vathy will be in most need of the support of NGO's.

During my internship, my line manager made us aware of an organisational decision that the NGO which I would be working with had made the decision (and was the only NGO on the island to do so) to work in the new camp. This was a decision which we were aware would not be favourable with other NGOs, but I understood the reasoning behind the decision. However, one week after the announcement we were made aware that we would be collaborating with the Greek Government and the RIC in the construction of the new camp.

After this announcement, I took some time to reflect on this development. Previous to this I had felt very passionately about the work being done by my organisation. I understood the reasoning for improving the conditions under which people were living in. However, in my mind, there was a clear divide between working within a previously established camp and supporting the population compared with actively partaking in the construction of a new camp. In my estimation, this was indistinguishable from endorsing the transfer of the population to a closed border camp. After partaking in the construction project for one day I

decided that this was a project I was not willing to engage in. Knowing that this could compromise my internship I decided to discuss this with my line manager.

However, I was surprised to discover that this was a common feeling amongst many people within the organisation and she understood my request to be removed from the project. Therefore, my remaining time with my internship was confined to the already established projects being run in the old camp.

The detrimental human cost of the construction of closed border camps on the Greek islands was recently highlighted by MSF in their five-year report. Under the proposed Migration Pact and the construction of the Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification centres construction began on a new camp and reception centre in Samos. In their report MSF highlight the five most concerning points which they find, and they describe the new camp being built on Samos as

*“Been built in a remote hillside far from any towns and completely isolated from public services. There is a heavy focus on security with a double fence perimeter, space for police patrols and fenced areas inside demarcating different zones. The site’s digital security system will include surveillance cameras and security gates secured with a fingerprint system for controlled entrance and exit. (MSF,2021)”*

Having been to the new camp itself during its construction stage I can attest to its isolation. The mental impact of residing in such an environment shall be detrimental for those who shall be forced to make it their home.

From this description of this camp, it is apparent that Europe is sending a clear message to those who hope to seek asylum. In this case, they are stating that they are not welcome here and those who evade pushbacks, are to be treated as criminals, denied their basic freedoms and forced to live in isolation in a prison type environment. In the weeks preceding the expected opening of the new reception centre, rumours ran rife throughout the camp and there was much unease amongst the residents.

The organisation EuroRelief oversaw shelter and allocation for those who would be sent to the new camp. They conducted this by documenting the number of people residing in the old camp. They collected the information of people living in the official camp and the outskirts, including the number of people living in each structure and their asylum status. EuroRelief has been working on the Greek island of Lesbos for some time now and has garnered a reputation for a brutalist approach to shelter allocation. Along with this, they have been known to work closely with the Greek government which is unusual amongst NGOs on the Greek islands. This close relationship afforded them more privileges such as being granted permission to work on the grounds of the official camp.

The presence of EuroRelief in the camp acted as a catalyst for tension during my time in Samos. From speaking informally to residents during my time with MOTG they were viewed with mistrust due to their close relationship with the Greek government and their highly religious ethos. On their website their main aim is stated as *Serve, Give and Pray*. The description of pray is given as “*We believe God answers prayer. Help us speak life into the darkest places.*” (“EuroRelief – About”, 2021). This caused unease amongst the vast Muslim population of the Vathy camp as rumours of attempted conversions spread. Although these rumours may perhaps be unfounded there is a precedent of this occurring. An article from The Guardian focuses on this, dealing with a case of several EuroRelief workers on the island of Lesbos. In the article there are claims that there were conversion forms handed out by members who worked for the EuroRelief, containing a statement to be signed which declared “*I know I’m a sinner ... I ask Jesus to forgive my sins and grant me eternal life. My desire is to love and obey his word.*” (Kingsley, 2016)

Although EuroRelief responded and stated that this was not done under the official capacity of the organisation, it is not a vast leap from the ethos of the organisation to presume that conversion to Christianity is an alternative motive for such a religious organisation to be operating in this field. As my organisation was to be working in conjunction with EuroRelief, it reaffirmed my decision to not partake in projects involving the new camp.

#### **4. Samos, Movement on the Ground and Covid 19**

This section shall discuss the Vathy Reception centre on Samos, in which I conducted my internship. Following this, an overview of my internship shall be examined along with the projects which they implement in Vathy. A brief overview of the volunteer team shall be examined following by a small note on the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on both the work of MOTG and the residents of the Vathy RIC.

##### **4.1 Samos**

The location at which I conducted my internship, and the focus of my research is that of the Greek island of Samos. Samos is located between the Greek mainland and the Turkish border. The two nations are separated by the Mycale Strait and Samos is situated closer to the Turkish mainland than the mainland of Greece.

The Vathy reception centre which is a repurposed military barracks serves as the first point of entry for many displaced people upon entering Greece. With a capacity of 648, the centre is vastly overpopulated with a population of 7200 as of January 2021, although has rapidly decreased in recent months due to reasons discussed previously. This has resulted in the formation of informal camps in the surrounding area informally referred to as the “Outskirts”. In contrast to other camps such as the ones located on the island of Lesbos, the population of Samos is relatively small (being in the region of 33,000). This has resulted in heightened tensions between the Greek population of the island and the displaced population.

During the period in which most residents arrived on Samos (before pushbacks were so prevalent), they were placed into camps in one of the five hotspots which are present on five Greek islands- Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos. Initially, they were placed in the RIC but as this became grossly overcrowded, people were forced to construct their structures in the outskirts of the RIC. People are forced to live in these conditions for years as the asylum procedure is infamously long and bureaucratic (SV,2021).

Two months before I arrived on Samos in February of 2021 the population was estimated to be in the region of 3,300. The demographics of the camp are vast, but the largest

communities come from four countries which are Afghanistan, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Iraq. Smaller populations include Iran, Cameroon and Gambia. Upon my arrival on Samos, thirty percent of the population were under the age of eighteen (with the majority of them hailing from Afghanistan and Syria). Fourteen percent of these minors were separated from their families and were therefore unaccompanied.

During the period in which migration substantially increased on Samos, the local population on Samos found little help from national or European authorities to cater for the increased number of people forced to seek shelter in Vathy. The initial response of the locals to this increase of irregular migration was one of compassion and empathy, in which many locals engaged in the assistance and even the rescue of individuals arriving on unsafe dinghies. The population of the Greek islands which were engaging in these activities were even nominated for the Nobel peace prize as a result of their efforts in 2016 (Boffey, 2016). However, as time continued and the lack of support became apparent the infrastructure of Samos, such as the hospital, was put under increased strain due to the rapidly increasing population. These institutions had also suffered under the budget cuts of the IMF during the Greek economic crisis, the impact of which is still heavily felt almost fifteen years after it first began in 2007 (Johnston, 2021).

The initial atmosphere and the attitudes of the locals to the increased migration, therefore, changed as time wore on. There was increased tensions and protests which sought to transfer asylum seekers to the mainland, which would contain better infrastructure to deal with the expanding population (SV, 2021).

The living conditions in the Samos hotspot are atrocious which is highlighted by many organisations who operate in the vicinity. This is something which I can verify from my time working both within the official camp and within the outskirts. During the period when the camp was severely overcrowded, the act of merely finding shelter or even a location in which to construct a structure was extremely difficult as the area was so overcrowded. In the official camp, the containers (or isoboxes) which people dwell in were severely overcrowded to the point of being extremely dangerous if a fire broke out, which was extremely common due to

subpar cooking conditions and inadequate heat during the winter months, which forced people to light fires to keep warm (Euro-Med Monitor, 2020).

During the summer the informal structures leave little protection for people during the soaring temperatures Greece experiences. Likewise, in the winter the cold and damp temperatures make people susceptible to infections and the cramped conditions lead to the easy spread of diseases. Existing in such conditions has a detrimental effect on camp residents, both mentally and physically. Many residents suffer from both PTSD and depression. This is further exacerbated by the fact that PTSD was removed from a list of medical conditions which allowed for an easier transfer of residents from Samos to the Greek mainland, by a Greek Asylum Law in 2019. This camp setting is especially dangerous for those who are members of the LGBTQI community with homophobic, transphobic and gender-based violence being unfortunately common (SV, 2021).

The dire conditions which exist in the camp are rarely highlighted by the media in any substantial manner partly due to the fact the journalists are officially banned from entering the camp. This rule is rarely broken and on occasions when they are permitted access, journalists are brought on an organised tour of the facilities in which the worst aspects of the living conditions are avoided (SV, 2021).

#### **4.2 Movement on the Ground**

The organisation with which I decided to conduct my internship was that of Movement on the Ground. MOTG is a Dutch organisation that was established in 2015, the driving force for the formation of the NGO was the infamous photograph of the five-year-old Alan Kurdi, who drowned on his journey in an attempt to reach European soil.

Their stated aims are to facilitate the integration of people on the move into their future societies. At the core of their operations is their Camp to CampUs philosophy. This philosophy is utilised in such a manner that allows for sustainable changes in the current situation concerning displaced people within Europe. With this philosophy, they hope to create a more humane and sustainable refugee camp in which human dignity is respected.



They focus especially on the inclusion of local populations to lessen tensions among the two groups. They use vocabularies such as host population and guest population for refugees/locals. They also refer to refugees as residents of the camps. In altering the vocabulary used they attempt to lessen the stigma surrounding the situation.

Through the various projects which they operate on the Greek islands of Samos and Lesbos, they create a sense of belonging and ownership for the residents of the camp. This empowerment creates a sense of dignity and inclusion within the camp residents to lessen the sense of the area as a camp and rather more of a *campus* which can create a sense of a safe and hospitable environment. (MOTG, 2019)

### 4.3 Movement on the Ground Projects

Movement on the Ground run several projects in their Samos location. The main project which was first established is that of waste management. During the peak of new arrivals on Samos, the vast majority of those arriving were residing in the outskirts of the official camp. As the majority of people were living in the outskirts of the camp there existed no facilities to maintain the area. There was and there still exists no official electricity, waste management or rubbish collection. Several NGOs found ways in which to fill the gaps which existed. MSF installed water taps for those who resided in the outskirts along with toilets in the form of portaloos which are cleaned twice daily. As there was no regular clearing of the waste, MOTG began a project in which along with a large group of community volunteers, they cleared the camp of waste and removed it with a garbage truck five times a week. On the sixth day, plastic bags were distributed to allow people to take out their rubbish. These bags could be left in one of several collection points which had been established. These were emptied three times a week and placed into the rubbish collection truck. Another project which MOTG engaged in, was the maintenance of the camp outskirts. This was necessary as the camp was built informally on the side of a mountain. The maintenance which we engaged in was mostly to improve the safety of the residents of the outskirts. This included the building of steps on the steepest hills, to lessen the chance of injury of residents. Along with this, we installed solar lights amongst the busiest streets which would operate at night, to act as a deterrent to sexual violence and theft.

Finally, the last project which I engaged in was to operate showers that were situated inside of the official camp. These showers were originally built and established by MSF for those who were housed in the outskirts as they had no access to bathing facilities (MSF, 2019). However, as MSF have a strict policy of not collaborating with governments to maintain their independence, they handed over the project to MOTG once it was established. This was because the showers were situated within the official ground of the reception centre.

The final project which MOTG had begun on Samos was that of the setting up of isoboxes or prefabricated containers in the new camp. However, as previously mentioned this was a project which I did not engage in as I fundamentally disagreed with the decision by MOTG, to collaborate with the government on the construction of closed border camps.

#### **4.4 Volunteer Team**

A project which is prevalent throughout the entirety of Greece is that of community or resident volunteers. This is a project in which members of the refugee population volunteer with an NGO in exchange for various benefits. The number of community volunteers working with MOTG Samos varied over my time there, as new community volunteers joined while others were being transferred to the mainland. During my time working with MOTG, the number of community volunteers remained about seventy for the months of April and May. However, in the final six weeks of my internship, this number dropped to ten as the completion of the new camp drew nearer. In exchange for volunteer work, which included three two hour shifts per week, MOTG offered fifteen-euro phone credit per month and snacks at the end of every shift to their community volunteers. MOTG also aided community volunteers with referrals to other NGOs for Non-Food Items (NFIs) such as clothes, shoes and referring them to legal professionals for advice on the asylum process.

Along with community volunteers, there were three permanent coordinators in the MOTG Samos team. These consisted of a community volunteer coordinator, a projects coordinator and a director of field operations, there were also two interns on-site, including myself.

#### 4.5 The Effects of Covid 19

In the lead up to my internship, there was much uncertainty surrounding whether it would be possible to conduct an “on the ground” internship due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic. After I began my interview process for working with MOTG, due to the constraints of the covid regulations in place both at my university and in Greece I got confirmation to move to Greece two weeks before my start date. Once I arrived, I completed a ten-day quarantine and a PCR test. The situation on the ground in Samos was heavily impacted by the pandemic. With a curfew in place, residents of the camp were prohibited from leaving after 9 pm. There is a medical team on-site in the form of the NGO Mediquality, which consists of volunteer medical staff, who are unable to administer medicine but are allowed to offer medical advice and advice on whether a trip to the nearby hospital is necessary or not. The camp is also provided with one doctor which is woefully inadequate for the size of the population.

Rapid tests were possible for residents through Mediquality and if a positive corona test occurred residents were moved to a quarantine area within the camp. Reports of inadequate living conditions within the quarantine area were reported by many NGOs. During my time on Samos vaccination for the Covid 19 virus were made available to residents of the camp. However, although the situation is ongoing, during the time of writing vaccination rates remained extremely low which can be in part attributed to the high levels of distrust of authorities by residents.

As MSF highlighted in their five year report the Covid 19 pandemic exacerbated the exclusion of the migrant community from the general population in Greece. The restrictions placed on those living within the camps were more severe and continued for a longer time frame in comparison to those of the general Greek population. On a physical level residents were contained in woefully cramped living conditions with poor access to basic needs such as clean water and sanitation facilities. The mental effect this had on camp residents cannot be understated. Most asylum cases were paused in response to the pandemic which further prolonged the already notoriously slow asylum procedure for asylum seekers. This accentuated the mental strain of the asylum process for many residents. Being confined to the cramped camp also increased the likelihood of camp residents contracting Covid. The

quarantine areas in which people with suspected Covid or positive results were lacking in basic needs and this was exacerbated by the fact that they were prevented from leaving by guards. (MSF, 2021)

## **5. Legislations, Procedures, Regulations and the Opening of Borders**

### **5.1 Outline**

This section shall outline the various pieces of legislation which are fundamental to understanding the current situation which exists in the border region between Greece and Turkey. After each piece of legislation and the effects which arise from them are examined, I shall explain how these are being put in place to engage in coercive engineered migration by various actors. Firstly, a more detailed account of the procedure of applying for asylum within Greece shall be given and the concept of the five Greek hotspots shall be discussed. Following this, the Dublin Agreement shall be explained as well as how this affected the situation with regards to displaced populations within Greece, and the effect of this on the Greek public attitude towards the increase in irregular migration and the wider European Union. Then a detailed description of the EU Turkey Deal of 2016 shall be given. Following this, an explanation for the 2021 designation of Turkey as a safe country shall be given along with the lasting implications of this deal. Finally, the section shall conclude with an analysis of the events of March 2020 and how this is connected to CEM.

### **5.2 Asylum Procedure**

Almost all residents of the Vathy RIC in Samos are in the procedure of applying for asylum within Europe. This is a complicated process that examines the admissibility of each asylum claim. The European Union is obliged to offer protection to those who are facing persecution or serious harm in their country of origin, according to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the protection of refugees. There is a shared responsibility among European Member states to enable a fair and dignified manner in which an individual can seek asylum. However as shall be examined in this paper this is not always the case (EC, 2021).

In the incidence of a first instance procedure an application is lodged upon arrival in Europe. Following the application, an interview is conducted by an asylum service employee based upon the application. Once this is completed, the application and interview are examined, and it is determined whether an individual is granted refugee status, subsidiary protection or rejected. Applications can be rejected based upon whether there exists a third

safe country for the applicant or the responsibility of granting asylum lies on another state (UNHCR, 2021).

If an application is accepted the individual is given a three-year residency permit and the opportunity to receive a travel document, enabling them to move within European member states for a period of ninety days. If an application is rejected there is an opportunity to appeal the decision twice considering new evidence. If both of these appeals are rejected the individual is ordered to leave Europe. However, in practice, this rarely occurs as many do not have the means to return to their country of origin or are unwilling to do so (ECRE, 2021).

Furthermore, an applicant may be subjected to a geographical restriction depending on their status. In the Aegean islands, it is very common for individuals to be issued what is colloquially referred to as a “closed card”, which means that they are unable to leave the island legally while the application is being processed. Conversely, if an individual has an “open card” they are only restricted to remaining within the territory of Greece itself and thus have the freedom to travel throughout the country (ECRE, 2021).

### **5.3 Dublin Regulation**

A piece of legislation that has had crucial and sometimes detrimental effects on how the asylum procedure is conducted is that of the Dublin Regulation. This Regulation has affected how an asylum claim of an individual is processed. As will be discussed below the Dublin Agreement has been criticised for placing an unfair burden on several states including Greece, which has added to the tension between Greek residents and those who are seeking asylum within the territory.

The Dublin Regulation also known as the Dublin III Regulation, Dublin II Regulation and the Dublin Convention was originally enacted in 1990, to establish what state would be responsible for the claim of an asylum seeker. It is used in combination with the EURODAC regulation, which compiles a database of fingerprints for asylum seekers preventing individuals from making several asylum claims in different EU member states (Regulation No. 604/2013).

The Regulation has been heavily criticised since Greece is the main entry point for many irregular migrants and thus it places an unfair burden on the Greek state to process these claims. As most asylum seekers are fingerprinted in Greece upon their initial arrival into Europe, if they attempt to claim asylum in other states they can be returned to Greece as it was their initial point of entry. By virtue of existing on the eastern border of the EU, Greece is the initial entry point for many asylum seekers. This means that Greece is placed under an unfair burden in comparison with other wealthier countries, such as Ireland. For example, Ireland with a GDP of 418 billion dollars in 2020, received 1566 applications and granting of protection status at first instance in 2020. This is in comparison with Greece with a GDP of 189 billion dollars and 40,559 applications in the same year (ECRE, 2021) (Trading Economics, 2021).

As the conditions for asylum seekers in Greece have been widely known to be insufficient for several years, this has resulted in the ceasing of the return of asylum seekers to Greece from Norway, Austria, Sweden and Finland over the past ten years. Although this was later rescinded it highlights how there is a wider consensus in the EU that the conditions for asylum seekers in Greece are insufficient (BBC, 2010).

It is shown here that the Dublin Regulation places an unfair burden on countries such as Greece. Greece is a country that has been placed under an unequal burden of responsibility for the increased amount of asylum seekers in recent years, especially considering that the country is still reeling from a huge economic crisis. This analysis is not meant to justify the gross human rights violations which occur against asylum seekers in Greece. However, it does serve as a background as to why the situation has developed in the manner it has.

#### **5.4 Hotspots**

The Hotspot approach, as it is referred to as, was implemented in response to the increase of irregular migration into Europe in 2015. The hotspots or reception centres were implemented in both Greece and Italy and were intended as a method to allow authorities to improve the orchestration of “*the initial reception, identification, registration and*

*fingerprinting of asylum-seekers and migrants*” (Orav & Luyten, 2020). The five hotspots which are in Greece are located on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos.

As previously stated, hotspots were initially set up to curb the migratory pressure on states after the increase in the amount of irregular migration into Europe. They also served to excel the asylum procedure for claimants who had arrived on one of the five hotspots and with the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal, was intended to allow for an easier procedure for deporting rejected applicants to Turkey, as it was deemed a safe country for Syrian refugees (which shall be discussed in further detail below). It also facilitated the geographical restrictions imposed on those who were seeking asylum. As many people were granted “closed cards” which prevents them from leaving the hotspot island for the duration of their asylum claim (Spathopoulou & Carastathis, 2020).

Since their founding, most Hotpots have been notoriously overcrowded which has resulted in deplorable living conditions. As the number of asylum seekers increased in Greece, so did the populations of the hotspots. As the facilities were only originally equipped to house 7,450 people, during the surge of irregular migration, they became grossly overcrowded. People had few other options, other than to construct their own shelters or tents, with no access to running water, electricity, heat or air conditioning. Previous to a devastating fire that destroyed the Moria Camp on Lesbos in September 2020, the camp housed 12,589 when the capacity was a mere 2,757. Following this fire, a new temporary camp was constructed to house the population which has a capacity of 10,000, although conditions remain dire in the new temporary camp (ECRE, 2021).

As the hotspots lie on relatively small Greek islands, the islands often do not contain the facilities to cater for the needs of a larger population. This has resulted in the strain on the infrastructure of the islands, such as the hospitals and other public services. This has led to violent protests and an uneasy relationship between locals and residents of the Hotspots. These tensions sometimes manifest themselves in the form of violent protests. For example, the burning of the Moria Camp on Lesbos highlighted these tensions with Greek police firing tear gas at the residents of the burnt camp (Smith, 2020).



## 5.5 EU Turkey Deal

The origins of the current asylum system in place in Greece can be traced back to the 2016 EU Turkey deal. The “statement of cooperation” was announced in March of 2016 as a response to an increase in the number of people reaching European soil by means of irregular migration (Long, 2018). The deal was to have lasting impacts on the European migration policy which still is highly influential in today’s climate.

The basis of the deal was to curb the amount of “irregular” migration entering Europe. This was mainly in response to the increase of people seeking asylum who had fled the still ongoing Syrian civil war. As mentioned previously, at the beginning of the so-called *migration crisis* there was an outpouring of sensationalised headlines from newspapers portraying Europe being attacked by migratory flows, which fuelled a misguided need to “protect” European borders from this influx. This further fuelled far-right rhetoric surrounding the subject and placed pressure from the public on European states to take action against the perceived threat. This accumulated in the aforementioned EU Turkey deal. As various EU member states placed an increasing amount of pressure on Turkey to contain the number of arrivals into Europe from Turkey, negotiations began to make this possible and thus the EU Turkey deal was borne of this.

The basis of this deal was every person arriving irregularly via Turkey into Greece would be sent back to Turkey. In exchange for this, for every person who was sent back to Turkey, one Syrian refugee would be resettled in the EU from Turkey. In addition to this Turkey vowed to strengthen its border with Greece to further prevent more people from reaching European soil.

Turkey was pledged six billion euro from the European Union, to support the massive Syrian refugee community it hosted and there were promised reduced restrictions for Turkish citizens to be allowed entry into the European Union. Finally, a promise was made that talks surrounding Turkey’s entry into the EU would be enthusiastically resumed, which had originally begun in 1987(Terry, 2021).

The immediate effect of this deal was that those who had entered Europe before the 20<sup>th</sup> of March were transferred off the Greek islands, and those who arrived after this were housed for an indefinite amount of time in one of the five hotspots. These essentially acted as detention centres, as asylum seekers were prevented from leaving the islands due to their issued “closed cards”. This caused a deterioration of living conditions as the hotspots became increasingly crowded.

In the period following the deal, the Greek authorities began to make adjustments to their asylum procedure. The most infamous adjustment which they made is that of the fast-tracked asylum procedure. The fast-tracked asylum procedure was initially implemented by “*way of exception*”, but it was placed into law in January 2020 with the implementation of (IPA), L. 4636/2019. Under this procedure, the asylum process including the registering of applications, notification of decisions and the receipt of appeals can be dealt with by the Hellenic Staff or the Armed Forces if the police force is not available to do so. The interviews of asylum seekers may be done by the European Asylum Support Office and in extreme cases, it may be conducted by members of the Hellenic Police or Army if they are trained to do so. This accumulates in an express result of asylum applications. The direct result of the so-called fast procedure was that those who had placed an asylum claim under these circumstances, had procedural guarantees overlooked, as it was done in such a short period.

This express decision resulted in the potential for inaccuracies and shortcomings during the process of assessing an application, such as the right to have a lawyer. Furthermore, the time in which an applicant must submit appeals for decisions is extremely short, with ten days given to appeal a decision which is supposed to be given within the first seven days of the application. This appeal is to be processed and given a result within four days and the applicant is given one notice to be present at the hearing for the appeal. This appeal is also where the applicant can be called upon to give more evidence (Asylum Information Database, 2021).

However, although these short time frames are in principle in place for both the processing of an application and the applicant, in reality, the only party who is held accountable to this time frame is the applicant. They must submit their appeals and their

evidence within the specified timeframe but the result from these applications can take months on end, during which the applicant must wait on standby for a decision on their application (Asylum Information Database, 2021).

The EU Turkey deal of 2016 is a defining factor in the current situation of displaced peoples within Europe. It solidified Europe's increasingly strict and severe new approach to migration. Along with this it has placed an unfair amount of responsibility onto the Greek nation which was already weakened by the IMF budget cuts to the state. It effectively prevented more people from entering Europe but, in this regard, it also created detention centres in which people seeking asylum are forced to wait in some cases years to get an answer from their asylum case. It was a definite symbol of the reinforcement of fortress Europe with the outsourcing of border control to countries such as Turkey in exchange for political favours and a cash incentive. It was a striking and symbolic departure from the international norms and protections which are granted to those who are fleeing unsafe situations.

As will be explored further into this thesis, this deal was struck during a period under which Turkish and Greek/ European Union relations were relatively stable. This approach towards border control worked for the EU only during periods in which these relations remained so. However, as will be shown further on this relationship was placed under increased strain in the years following this deal. The result of this was an increased volatility of the situation and the weaponization of refugee populations by both actors as a political tool to intimidate and coerce each other.

### **5.6 Turkey as a Safe Third Country**

The weaponization of migratory flows by state actors as a means of political tool can be seen as in the recent designation of Turkey as a third safe country by Greece on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021. In this controversial statement the Greek government designated Turkey as a safe third country for nationals from five countries; Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. There has been much controversy surrounding this decision for several reasons. Many non-state actors have spoken out against this decision and have heavily criticised the Greek government for this designation.

The reasons for this criticism shall be discussed below. One of the main factors is the fact that Turkey contains the most amount of refugees in the world. Turkey hosts more refugees than the entirety of the EU. According to a UNCHR report, Turkey was hosting a total of 3.7 million refugees at the end of 2020, which is 2 million more than the second-largest hosting country of Colombia with a total of 1.7 million (UNHCR, 2021). The number of refugees hosted in Turkey is amplified when a comparison of population numbers is done. Turkey with a population of 82 million is hosting more refugees than any European Member state within the European Union which has a combined population over five times that of Turkey, at 446 million people (Europa, 2021) (World Bank, 2021).

A signed statement by 40 organisations on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June highlight the issues with this designation. The main critique is that it reinforces the policy (from the 2016 deal) which deflects the responsibility to cater for refugees to third countries from outside the EU, controversially this also includes vulnerable populations such as unaccompanied minors.

Another point of concern with the decision to designate Turkey as a third safe country is because Turkey is not a part of the 1951 Refugee Convention with regards to non-European Union Nationals. This indicates that Turkey does not implement the Refugee Convention for those who originate from outside of the EU. This is concerning as all five nationalities entailed in the designation of Turkey as a safe country are non-EU countries. This convention was designed to provide protection to those who are forced to flee their homes due to the threat of serious harm or persecution. Along with this, there is added concern as Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention in March 2021, which explicitly allowed for the protection of those who were vulnerable to gender-based violence (Relief Web, 2021).

In addition, there have been serious accusations against Turkey of engaging in the refolement of refugee populations back to warzones. This has been alleged by various Human Rights Actors who have made claims that Turkey has deported Syrian refugees back to northern Syria in recent years (HRW, 2021). Although these accusations have been heavily denied by Turkish actors, there have been statements by Turkish authorities that they are willing to facilitate the “willing” return of Syrian nationals to non-specified “safe areas”.

Finally, the concept of a safe third country assumes that there is an attachment between the people seeking asylum and the third safe country and that this country is consenting to accept the asylum seekers, neither of these is true for nationals of these five countries and Turkey (Relief Web, 2021).

This decision to designate Turkey as a safe third country is also illogical as Turkey has refused to accept any return asylum seekers from Greece for as long back as March 2021. This leaves the people who are a victim of this decision further into limbo and extremely vulnerable to destitution and social exclusion. (Relief Web, 2021).

Along with this Turkish human rights abuses have been widely documented by human rights actors. For example, taking the Amnesty International Annual Report of 2020 on Turkey, there is a long list of the key elements of human rights abuses within the state. These abuses contain but are not limited to torture and other ill-treatment, rights of LGBTQI peoples, human rights defenders and freedom of expression. Amnesty International pay particular attention to the abuse of asylum seekers and refugee rights by Turkish authorities. They particularly emphasise these abuses in the opening of the Greek border by Turkish officials, and the proceeding encouragement of asylum seekers to cross the border. This resulted in widespread violence by Greek border authorities and resulted in the alleged deaths of three migrants (which shall be discussed further in section six). They further highlight the allegations of refoulment of displaced peoples by Turkish officials. They report that 6000 people were deported back to Afghanistan disregarding the fact that the situation in Afghanistan did not allow for the safe return of people. (Amnesty International, 2020)

This is a clear expression of state actors engaging in intimidation tactics due to political reasons and the direct consequences of this are that an innumerable amount of people, will be further subjected to traumatic experiences such as pushbacks and violence at the hands of official state agents. As has been shown in this section, Turkey is clearly not a safe country for the return of refugees and thus the decision by Greece to designate it as such seems illogical. It can be assumed this decision was made in an effort to coerce the Turkish state into accepting these returns. Violent treatment of refugees at the hands of state actors

during procedures such as deportation and alleged pushbacks has been widely reported by human rights organisations who have published several exposes on the subjects.

### 5.7 The Opening of the Turkish Border

A clear indication of state actors using displaced peoples as a political weapon is highly visible in the occurrences of March 2020. Following the promises made to Turkey by the EU in the 2016 agreement, the relationship between the two actors became increasingly fraught. With Turkey feeling as though they had been placed under an increasingly unfair burden while hosting the largest displaced population in the world, tensions soared with brash statements being made by European state heads and Erdoğan, the Turkish president. Such as the infamous quote from a speech given by Erdoğan in Izmir in 2019, when he stated “*I’ll throw the Greeks into the sea*” as part of a Turkish folk song (Kokkinidis, 2019). In this climate, the death of 34 Turkish armed forces in the Iblid region of Syria on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February acted as the spark which was to result in huge political consequences. The large number of refugees being hosted within Turkey was coupled with the sentiment that Turkey lacked international support for its military campaign (Psaropoulos, 2020). This tension was heightened by a statement made by the Greek prime minister in which he denied any wrongdoing by Greece when he stated, “*Greece does not bear any responsibility for the tragic events in Syria and will not suffer the consequences of decisions taken by other*” (Psaropoulos, 2020). Following these deaths, the Turkish president stated to the media that he planned to open the land border between Turkey and Greece and in effect the border with the European Union. He stated to do this by not preventing the movement of people from Turkey to Greece, which Turkey had pledged to do in the 2016 deal. This statement resulted in the huge movement of peoples to the western border of Turkey, gathering at the border between the two states. In response to this movement of people and the statement by the Turkish president, Greece responded by closing two major gates and took on an increasingly strict stance to prevent migration into the country. The number of people who gathered at the border crossing is disputed but is alleged to be in the region of 12,000 to 25,000 people (Dicle Ergin, 2020). Along with strengthening its border control measures Greece also sought additional support from the European Union to prevent the entry of migrants into its territory.

Along with these measures, Greece also introduced an emergency legislative decree, which halted the procedure of those attempting to seek asylum for one month on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2020 (ECRE, 2021). In addition to this emergency decree, Greece also introduced the suspension of asylum procedures on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March due to the Covid 19 pandemic. This was heavily criticised by humanitarian actors including MSF as it further prolonged the asylum procedure, which was already criticised for being unnecessarily long by many humanitarian actors (Dicle Ergin, 2020).

As individuals attempted to cross the border to Greece, they were met with violent rebuttals by Greek authorities. As the main border gates into Greece had been closed by officials many resorted to attempting to cross using the Evros river and nearby rivers. Although estimates vary it is suspected that in the region of five thousand people were pushed back by Greek border agents in this period. For those who managed to cross into Greece, there were widespread reports of those being pushed back by way of land pushbacks from Greek territory, which shall be discussed further in the section on land pushbacks.

Reports of individuals arriving back in Turkey after being pushed back were verified by Turkish locals, as they were interviewed by various organisations and stated that they had helped care for individuals who were injured and, in some cases, stripped of their belongings and their clothes in the process of the pushbacks (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This section has outlined the various deals, procedures, regulations and mechanisms which has resulted in the current situation which is present in the borderzone between Greece and Turkey. It has highlighted the legal and formal procedures which have in part caused the more inhumane and illegal border control practices, which shall be discussed in the following sections. Thus far, it has become apparent that Turkey was engaged in CEM. As we can see from Greenhill's definition of CEM is that it:

*“Refers to those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated by state or non-state actors to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state or states” (Greenhill 2016).*

In her 2016 paper, she clearly illustrates that Turkey took on the role of an opportunist actor engaging in CEM concerning the 2016 deal. This was discussed previously, but to reiterate Turkey did not directly create the population movement but manipulated it in such a manner that the results of the deal were favourable to them. However, the events of March 2020, show the results of what occurred when Turkey became impatient with the inadequacy of the support given to the Turkish state from the EU. In an act that mobilised the refugee population, the Turkish state opened borders with Greece in the Evros region. In doing so the population movement was manipulated by a state actor to induce concessions in the form of increased support from the EU in Turkish military campaigns amongst others.

However, as will be discussed further on, the concessions from the EU which Turkey was hoping to receive did not materialise. This act merely resulted in increased human suffering for displaced populations in the region and a heightening of tensions between the two states. It can be assumed that Turkey had hoped that Greece would be forced to accept this population movement. But what occurred as will be examined in the coming sections, was rather than concede to Turkish demands, the Greek state backed by the wider EU also began engaging in CEM through various processes both legal and illegal.

A piece of legislation that emphasises how the Greek state was engaging in the practice of CEM, was the designation of Turkey as a third safe country. Given the uneasy relationship between the EU and Turkey following March 2020, and the refusal of Turkey to accept any returns from Greece in March 2021, Greece decided to designate it as a safe country for asylum seekers within its territory. In doing so Greece threatened to deport a large section of the displaced population from its territory into Turkey. Although Turkey refused to accept these returns thus far, it is no less an act of coercive engineered migration by the Greek state. As the refugee population within Greece was used in such a manner as to coerce the Turkish state into accepting the return of this population, and because Greece did not



partake in the creation of this population, the Greek state can be deemed as an opportunist actor, as was the case with Turkey in the 2016 deal.

Furthermore, as is highlighted in Topaks paper:

*“Borderzones demonstrates that biopolitics operates through sovereign territorial controls and surveillance, ...and the suspension of rights” and “individuals are reduced to mere biological entities deprived of political status”.*

This is clearly shown in the creation of hotspots and will be further accentuated through the opening of the planned Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification centres on the Greek islands. With regards to the hotspot approach, individuals are confined to the geographical zone of the island, denied their right to freedom of movement as many are issued with “closed cards” and thus are banned from entering the Greek mainland. Once the new MPRICs are opened residents shall be subjected to 24-hour surveillance along with the requirement to enter their fingerprint upon entry and exit, being reduced to mere biological entities as stated by Topak.

The implementation of the Hotspot approach is also a prime example of what van Houtum and Bueno Lacey deem as the border camp. In their examination of the border camp, they state:

*“The segregation and maltreatment of people who share a bodily resemblance or cultural affinity with already-discriminated ethnic minorities in EUropean societies send a toxic message to the EU’s own citizens: it tells them that the fundamental rights to which the EU adheres do not fully apply to undocumented migrants” (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020).*

This is confounded by their confinement to the island hotspots, that they are prohibited from leaving because of their “closed cards”. Furthermore, in the new camps, as discussed in section three, the constant surveillance through cameras of the residents reinforces the arguments made by van Houtum and Bueno Lacey when they state that these settings are “zoo-like” in their design, which further stigmatises and reaffirms the narrative of migrant’s undesirability within Europe.

As this section has highlighted, there is a political game being played between Greek and Turkish authorities with constant intimidation tactics being used by both actors. The devastating effects of this can be seen in the Turkish opening of the land border between Turkey and Greece in March 2020 in which the authorities encouraged and facilitated the movement of displaced peoples across the border. This was a manipulation tactic by the Turkish Government in retaliation for the perceived lack of support for Turkey in their military campaigns, thus, the goal of this action was to receive military concessions from Greece and the wider European Union. This was met with a violent rebuttal from the Greek authorities in which they violently pushed back those who had been encouraged there by the Turkish authorities. This is a constant *back and forth* between the two actors in which the only outcome is further human suffering as both actors involved refuse to concede to the others demands.

## 6. Frontex and Pushbacks

### 6.1 Outline

A large part of this thesis deals with the practice of pushbacks and therefore this section shall deal with the definition of a pushback. Following this, an in-depth examination of the development of Frontex shall be given as they are one of two main actors allegedly involved in pushbacks within Greek territory, along with the Hellenic Coast Guard. This paper shall then outline the process of both a sea and a land pushback. Following this, an analysis shall be done on the types of violence which are occurring in conjunction with Frontex and HCG operations. Finally, a brief outline of the deaths which have occurred due to the alleged pushbacks shall be discussed.

### 6.2 An Overview of Pushbacks

Pushbacks are generally taken to be the forced expulsion of migrants by state actors from one state into another or international waters. The practice of pushbacks generally takes place immediately after migrants have entered the new state. The implementation of pushbacks by official actors violates several laws including “*the prohibition of collective expulsions stipulated in the European Convention on Human Rights*”. (“Push-back”, 2021) Pushbacks are officially denied by both the Greek authorities and the EU actors which are active in Greece such as Frontex. When confronted by allegations of pushbacks by the New York Times, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has stated “*It has not happened. We’ve been the victims of a significant misinformation campaign*” (Cossé, 2020). Along with this the Executive Director of Frontex, Fabrice Leggeri, has also denied any involvement of the organisation in pushback operations (ECRE, 2020),(Popp, 2020). However, this thesis shall explore the mounting evidence which is supporting the various claims of pushbacks from individual NGOs, who dedicate their time to reporting pushbacks to various reputable new sources, which have published many reports on the practice of pushbacks in Greece.

On a personal note, during my time in Samos, I heard various stories of boat pushbacks and also ones that were being conducted on land. In these cases, we noticed an

increase in the amount of police in a certain area of the island, this was followed by reports from the Aegean Boat Report of people arriving on Greek soil and then being forced back out to sea into Turkish waters by coastal authorities. On the few occasions that people managed to evade capture by the authorities, they hid in the surrounding area before making their way to the RIC to begin their asylum case. In these cases, the announcement of new arrivals was incredibly secretive with many people forced into quarantine zones and thus prevented from speaking with actors who could verify their experiences of pushbacks.

In one instance in April, my team members and I noticed an increased police presence along the coast of Samos during our journey to work. Once we began work, rumours began circulating of a pushback that had occurred after several people had arrived on Samos. Several days after this incident a mother and three children arrived in the Vathy RIC and were placed into the quarantine area. Rumours circulated that the family had evaded the pushback by hiding in the nearby woods and walking the 40 kilometres to the camp by foot where they registered as asylum seekers. These rumours later proved to be true by an article published in *The Guardian*. In this article, the woman from Palestine told how she hid in the woods to evade being pushback by the Greek authorities (Fallon, 2021). The remaining people who had been pushed back were later found by the Turkish coast guard floating in a vessel in the Aegean Sea (Daily Sabah, 2021).

### **6.3 Frontex**

Throughout this thesis, the role and the actions of the organisation Frontex will be discussed in detail. To add context to the current situation an explanation for the origins of Frontex shall be discussed.

The introduction of the Schengen area is considered to be an outstanding achievement of the European Union (even though it began outside the confines of the European framework). The concept of the Schengen area was to allow the freedom of movement of people and goods between member states without border control. Once the Schengen area was operational there were concerns that unimpeded travel throughout the European Union would incentivise irregular migration into Europe, as there were fewer border controls. This caused a shift in the border controls of Europe in the period of the 1990s. The controlling of

borders in Europe shifted from an individual state matter to external border control of the Schengen area. Various and mostly informal methods were attempted in the period proceeding this although none were found to be effective. Member states were resistant to surrender the responsibility of border control to a European Institution. However, in 2004 several Eastern European countries were set to join the Schengen Area which generated the political incentive to create such an institution, as there was doubt on the ability of the new entrants into the EU to adequately control their border and thus the borders of the EU. In response to this the “*the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union*”, commonly referred to as Frontex, was established through Council Regulation (EC) No. 2007/20043 in October of 2004 and began to operate in May of the following year (Hartwig, 2020).

As mentioned previously, in recent years there has been an increased framing of the so-called *migration crisis*. It is this narrative that has created the securitization of migration and border controls within the European Union. This has had an extensive effect on how Frontex has operated in recent years. At its inception, Frontex had a mere budget of six million euros and a team of around 70 people. However, this has drastically increased in the years with a notable increase in the funding allocated at the height of the *migration crisis* in 2015 and the following years. There are plans that by the year 2027 there shall be 10,000 people employed by the agency and a budget of 11.3 billion for the years between 2021-2027. This is a drastic increase from its establishment but also from the year 2018 when the designated budget was a mere 320 million euro and a staff of 700 (Hartwig, 2020). This colossal increase in both its funding and its personnel have been put in place to allow it to acquire its own equipment so as not to be reliant on the equipment allocated to them by member states.

Along with the increase in financial and manpower means, Frontex has also been granted much more responsibility since its founding. During the first few years, its main directive was to support the member states in their efforts at border control. However, this progressed in 2007 when Frontex was allocated the power to create “Rapid Border Intervention Teams” to support the control of irregular migration into European soil and

furthermore in 2011 it was tasked with the establishment of “Europe Border Guard Teams” (Hartwig, 2020).

In 2013 the power of Frontex further increased with the introduction of a Surveillance system which was referred to as Eurosur. With the creation of Eurosur information could be rapidly exchanged between Member states of the EU and Frontex. This meant that information collected was centralised on a regional and European level. The border which is surveyed by Eurosur expands beyond the geographical confines of the EU, with surveying methods such as satellite imagery being utilised in the “pre-frontier area”. This information is collected and then shared with individual member states of the EU.

Perhaps the most influential development in the manner in which Frontex operated was the so-called *migration crisis* in 2015. In this period the organisation was granted more capacity and underwent a transformation where it was granted a far more operational stance than previously. In alignment with this new phase of the agency, it adopted a new name, in 2016, which it is referred to today as the “European Border and Coast Guard Agency” (Hartwig, 2020).

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the agency’s expansion in recent years is the initiative that sought to allow Frontex the “right to intervene”. There was a push to make this possible in both 2016 and 2019. This initiative would allow Frontex to intervene in situations in which the commission deemed necessary, even if the member state whose territory which it fell under had not granted its permission. Although this proposal has not been approved thus far, it is not implausible that with the increased powers of Frontex in recent years and the increasing criminalisation of migration that the idea shall not only be put forward again but even perhaps it shall be accepted.

The development of the agency Frontex has rapidly been accelerated in recent years, what began as a small relatively insignificant operation is now perhaps one of the biggest if not the biggest actor in the role of border control mechanisms in Europe today. This is highlighted by the fact that it will have 10,000 strong “standing corps” in the near future and that Eurosur was officially integrated into the Frontex Regulation.

Frontex has also expanded to include crime-fighting in its operations. In its inception, Frontex was not intended as a crime-fighting unit but merely as an agency to support and coordinate the actions of member states. However, as has been discussed in the previous paragraph the scope of the responsibilities of Frontex has expanded to include many other responsibilities in recent years. How Frontex was granted permission to engage in so-called crime-fighting was through the Eurosur regulation. Through this regulation Frontex was now explicitly responsible for “*detecting, preventing and combating illegal immigration and cross-border crime*” (Hartwig, 2020).

The increased push to see border control as a crime-fighting approach is highly connected to the increased securitization of border control mechanisms. This can be seen in the new powers allocated to Frontex through Eurosur, but also in its close working relationship with Europol. It also has been involved in the “Criminal Information Cell” a Common Security and Defence mission and will continue to work in that field (Hartwig, 2020).

This increasing securitization by border control actors such as Frontex is a serious cause for concern. This is because how Frontex is operating at present is to act as a crime-fighting unit, which is problematic as many of the people whom Frontex comes into contact with during their border control activities are not in fact criminals. They are vulnerable people who require protection and thus this development is highly problematic.

#### **6.4 Frontex Human Rights Abuses**

Now that a comprehensive insight into the history of the organisation of Frontex has been given, this section shall outline what the main accusations against Frontex are. Along with this, this section shall draw on this evidence to examine how the EU is engaging in CEM with the use of institutions such as Frontex.

Frontex has long been criticised by human rights advocates for their apparent disregard for human rights and their deterrence of irregular migration into Europe at any cost. There is mounting evidence that Frontex operates in conjunction with the Hellenic Coast Guard in their operations involving pushbacks. According to an article published by the

Guardian, there have been several incidents in which the vessels operated by Frontex have created dangerous waves to cause the vessel containing migrants to be pulled off course. Once this is done the Hellenic Coast Guard allegedly pushes the vessel back into Turkish waters where it is presumably picked up by the Turkish coast guard (Fallon, 2020).

Reports of either perpetrating or being indirectly involved in both pushbacks and violence along the Greek border have been circulating for years. However, it was in October of 2020 that the issue truly came into the public eye, when investigative journalists from the news agency *Bellingcat* published a report, in conjunction with six other organisations, which accused Frontex of facilitating and in some cases engaging in pushback activities. This captured the attention of the international media along with Brussels (Euronews, 2021). Although there were allegations that Frontex attempted to prevent the publication of these claims an official investigation was launched into Frontex in October of 2020 (TRT World, 2021).

The official investigation which came in the form of an internal probe concluded from its investigation that there was no proof of pushbacks or non-refoulment in eight of the thirteen incidents investigated. However, the remaining five incidents remained unresolved. Some criticisms also said that the investigation had a very small scope which only included a very small number of incidents when there are allegations of thousands of pushbacks occurring. Along with this, there was a failure in the internal report to investigate the land border of Evros where there have been allegations of violent land pushbacks where Frontex has operated for over a decade (HRW, 2021).

However, the European Parliament released a report on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, on the activities of Frontex in which the findings presented in this report were decidedly more critical of the organisation than the internal probe proved to be (Bassetto & Vignola, 2021). Although, in their report they did not explicitly state that Frontex had been involved in the actual practice of pushbacks, they did find that there had been a fundamental failing in the organisation and in particular its executive director, Fabrice Leggeri, to address reports of pushbacks and had actively ignored reports and in some cases video footage of these violations (Cossé, 2021). Although Frontex stated that they would consider the



recommendations, it is unlikely that any serious overhauls in the manner in which the organisation is run will occur, given the capacity at which the organisation is due to expand in the coming years.

### **6.5 Sea Pushbacks and a Heinous New Take on an Old Practise**

The practice of informal returns of migrants or pushbacks is not a new occurrence in the Greek Turkish borderzone. It has been documented for many years now, but it has only been in the last five years or so that the practice has become systematic as an implementation of a border control mechanism (Reidy, 2018).

In 2018 the Greek Refugee council claimed that the increased use of pushbacks as a border control mechanism had increased to such an extent, that it constituted a systematic use of pushbacks. In this report, they outlined how these pushbacks took place. Most reports of pushbacks shared similar elements which amounted to a common procedure which many people who had been pushed back experienced. The common elements which the Greek Refugee council found shall be discussed below. The demographic of the people being subjected to sea pushbacks is varied and no particular group is spared from the practice. This includes families, pregnant women, minors and in many cases individuals who have been subjected to torture.

This section shall outline what was previously the most common and publicised form of pushbacks in Greece- sea pushbacks. Although in recent months there has been a worrying trend of land pushbacks, of individuals who have been residing in Greece for a prolonged period, sea pushbacks have been the most preeminent form of pushbacks in the region. According to Mare Liberum, an organisation that monitors human rights in the Aegean Sea with the use of their two boats and by land, the pushbacks which occur in the Aegean Sea do not take into account the origin, personal history or any relevant documents of the individual push backed. In the practice of pushbacks, the protection of individuals is deliberately disregarded. Pushbacks that occur on sea, usually occur within twelve nautical miles of the land of the state in question. This is because any territory beyond this point is considered international waters. According to maritime law, any boat which becomes distressed in the

international territory should be assisted by the nearest captain, as laid out in the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1979 Convention on Maritime Rescue. However, as will be shown below these laws are outwardly disregarded by actors perpetrating pushbacks. As highlighted by Mare Liberum there are two main scenarios with regards to sea pushbacks. The first being cases in which there is the expulsion of people out of the state's ocean territory and the second deals with a pushback of people into another state's territory (Mare Liberum, 2020).

Due to the geographical positioning of Greece and Turkey, there are no international waters in between the two states, as they lie too close together. This results in the second scenario been exclusively used in the Aegean Sea. This practice is thus in clear violation of the principle of non-refoulment but also can be deemed a violation of the prohibition on collective deportations, as pushbacks often occur to groups of individuals who attempt to cross a border collectively (Mare Liberum, 2020).

According to Aegean Boat Report statistics for July 2021, 73 boats attempted to reach Greek soil from Turkey which included 1,978 individuals. Of these 73 boats, only 9 boats were registered as arriving in Greece, carrying 155 people. The Turkish Coast Guard assisted 1,823 people who had been discovered floating in Turkish waters or found on the beaches. In 64.1% of these cases, it was reported that the individuals involved had been pushed back by the Hellenic Coast Guard under orders of the Greek Government. As per the same report, thus far, new arrivals on the Greek islands are down 83.4% in comparison with 2020. With a decrease of 57.4% in July compared with July of 2020. As of the end of July 2021, there have been 534 boats stopped by authorities in comparison with 344 in July of 2020. It is apparent from these statistics that the practice of pushbacks is becoming increasingly prevalent in the Aegean Sea (AegeanBoatReport, 2021).

It remains true that states have a right to protect their borders. However, this sovereign right to protect their borders is under the assumption that while they have the right to do so it must not infringe on an individual's right to seek asylum within Europe if they are in danger of harm in their country of origin. The use of pushbacks to expel those who are seeking asylum is not a new or unknown tactic by Greek authorities in the name of protecting

borders. It is referred to as an open secret of sorts by Dimitris Koros a lawyer for the Greek Council for Refugees (Reidy 2018).

This is supported by the many thousands of documented cases of pushbacks by Human Rights organisations such as the Border Violence Monitoring Network, the Aegean Boat Report and numerous articles published by news sources such as the New York Times, Der Spiegel and Deutsches Welt. However, despite mounting pressure and irrefutable evidence, there is still a denial by Greek and European official actors that pushbacks are being used systematically to limit entries into Europe (Panoutsopoulou, 2020).

How the Greek Government utilises bordering mechanisms to deter migration and thus to send migrants back to Turkey has become increasingly inventive and inhumane in recent years. In 2020 the Greek authorities looked abroad in an attempt to find new methods in which to conduct pushbacks. Looking towards Australia and their infamous approach to irregular migration, reports began appearing of migrants being found in orange inflatable rafts by the Turkish authorities. This was a similar case to what had begun to happen in Australia in 2013 when migrants had been found by locals in Indonesia in similar circumstances. In the case of those who were found in Indonesia, the vessels in use were sophisticated life vessels which included navigational systems, air conditioning and an engine. In each case, the vessel was equipped with just enough fuel to make it to Indonesia. In the case of the Greek counterparts, they were not so lucky. The vessels in which the migrants were found after being pushed back from Greece, were far less sophisticated than their Australian counterparts. In a report published by Just Security, eleven similar situations were documented in the period between May and March of 2020 (Keady-Tabbal & Mann, 2020). Migrants were found on Turkish territory after being pushed back by Greek authorities, in orange life rafts which did not contain engines or propellers. This practice has continued into 2021, as the Aegean Boat Report stated that of the 41 pushbacks they documented in July 2021, eleven of these were with the use of rescue equipment/life rafts (AegeanBoatReport, 2021). There is particular malice to this type of pushback, as this equipment, which was developed to preserve life, is being used to deny people their basic human rights and in some cases has directly caused the deaths of those being pushed back.

## 6.6 Land Pushbacks

As has been mentioned previously the practice of pushbacks is not a new concept with regards to migration control, not only within Greece but worldwide. However, there has been a worrying trend in the past few years of reports of land pushbacks. Although this is a different approach to sea pushbacks it is no less traumatic and, in some cases, perhaps more heinous than sea pushbacks.

Since March 2020 there have been many documented cases by human rights organisations of a new policy of border control in which asylum seekers are forcibly and illegally removed from Greek soil and transported to Turkey. This differs from sea pushbacks in that with sea pushbacks they are prevented from entering European soil, whereas with land pushbacks they are within European soil and in some cases already in the process of applying for asylum before being forcibly and illegally removed. The formula for these pushbacks has been pieced together by various organisations which have been documenting the occurrences. They follow a common trend of nearly exclusively affecting men, with women and children not being included (which differs from sea pushbacks, as they are practised indiscriminately). A group of migrants who are situated far from the Turkish border, are arrested and subjected to arbitrary detentions in police stations, in a border region with Turkey called Evros (during which the detained individuals do not have access to adequate hygiene facilities). Once there, they are taken to a second location where their belongings are taken from them, including on some occasions, the documentation of their asylum claim. They are then forcibly pushed back to Turkey, with the widespread use of violence being used by authorities during the transfer. They are then subsequently placed back on boats which are grossly overcrowded and extremely dangerous during the sea pushback (GCR, 2018).

The Evros region has frequently been an area in which new arrivals have been pushed back into Turkey by Greek authorities. However, what has changed now is that it is alleged that it is people who have been living in Greece for an extended amount of time, who are now being forcibly returned to Turkey (Souli, 2020). This is a relatively new development in the sphere of border control between Greece and Turkey. Organisations that have been both documenting and reporting on the new tactic of illegal expulsions include The Border

Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN, 2020), Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2020) and the UNHCR (UNHCR 2020).

In one particularly extraordinary case, an Iraqi Kurdish journalist and a recognised refugee, Mohammed Hawraman, was working in a north-western port town in Greece and was arrested. Along with 39 other individuals, he was transported 700km to the Evros region and pushed back by authorities. What makes this pushback particularly notable, is that previously to being pushed back Hawraman had been photographed with the Greek prime minister in Greek territory and thus had proof of his time in Greece along with his refugee status. However, following this incident and after spending several months in Turkey Hawraman elected to seek asylum in Italy instead (Souli, 2020).

The first inland pushback of migrants by Greek authorities was recorded on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 by the BVMN. In their report it was alleged that 40 asylum seekers were forcibly removed from the Diavata refugee camp, their belongings were stolen by authorities, they were subjected to violence at the hands of the police and finally, they were expelled from Greece into Turkey (BVMN,2020).

This is a new take on an old tactic that has been utilised by authorities which grossly violates Human Rights and is done in the name of protecting European borders. It highlights how the Greek authorities are becoming more brazen in their violation of human rights and international law. This practice is unlikely to subside in the coming years unless the perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes.

## **6.7 Violence During Pushbacks**

Along with the traumatic experience of being pushed back many have their lives endangered not only by virtue of being forced back to a country that may not be safe to them, migrants who are pushed back also are exposed to extreme violence at the hands of authorities during these traumatic experiences. In addition to being exposed to horrendous violence, the number of people who have died due to pushbacks has increased with the number of people being pushed back. This section shall examine the use of force by authorities during pushbacks.

In June of 2021 Amnesty International released a report on the violent occurrences along the Greek border. In this report, they documented the case of 21 occurrences of pushbacks between June and December of 2020. Which they documented with the assistance of 16 individuals who had experienced these traumatic incidents, at the hands of authorities. Through this research, they were able to conclude that *“it proves the continued, routine use of these brutal tactics by Greece as an entrenched method of border control at land and sea”* (Amnesty International, 2021).

In this report, they highlight the fact that with mounting evidence the policy of pushbacks can no longer be attributed to extreme circumstances or the product of individuals who have gone rogue, defying the orders of their superiors, in contrast, they found that the use of pushbacks and adjoining violence is the result of a policy by the Greek authorities to curb irregular migration into the EU.

Furthermore, through the research and the testimonies which Amnesty had collected, through this report, they found that the individuals were subjected to systematic violence which amounted to torture and other inhumane or degrading treatment. A summary of the types of violent treatment that individuals were subjected to shall be given below.

From the 21 incidents that Amnesty explores in their report, they found 17 incidents that included acts of violence against migrants during the process of a pushback. Through their research, they found incidents where individuals were exposed to violence which ranged from pushes, kicks and slaps to more severe violent acts which resulted in broken bones and one horrendous case it resulted in the breaking of one man's spine.

Through this report, Amnesty could not conclusively prove that these incidents were being conducted by official bodies. However, they did find compelling evidence that these events were being committed by individuals who were *“exercising public law enforcement functions”* (Amnesty International, 2021). They found this in the manner in which the individuals presented themselves and the gear which they were equipped with amounted to considerable proof that they were indeed public law enforcement officials. In some cases, there was the use of police or military vehicles which would amount to the assumption that it

was indeed being conducted by law enforcement, or at least it was being conducted in cooperation and with the consent of law enforcement individuals.

In their report, they document cases where people were subjected to a brutal beating while being pushed back. The perpetrators of these beatings were often dressed as “*soldiers*” who were equipped with machine guns, balaclavas in some cases German shepherds to deter any attempts at escaping.

Another common theme in the testimonies gathered was the use of violent or abusive searches during pushbacks. In the cases where these searches were recorded many of them were accompanied by abusive or rough behaviour. Those being searched often had their belongings confiscated and, in many cases, they were not returned. In many cases, male officers searched females even when they vocalised that they did not consent to this, and children were also subjected to searches. Out of the sixteen testimonies collected there were eleven incidents in which men were forced to undress in front of women and children and one case recorded their clothes were not returned, thus they were forced to continue their journey in their underwear (Amnesty International, 2021).

The process of body searches is a highly regulated process when they are necessary. It is explicitly stated in Human Rights laws that body searches must only be conducted when it is absolutely necessary and that they must be conducted by competent state authorities and by the same gender of the individual being subjected to the body search. It must be conducted in the least intrusive method possible and cannot be used as a means of intimidation. It is apparent from the testimonies collected by Amnesty International, that the strict rules and regulations which dictate how body searches are to be carried out have been completely disregarded in the cases of the individual testimonies.

It was concluded by Amnesty international that how these searches were conducted was arbitrarily and unlawfully. Along with these unlawful searches, there were also cases of naked searches. The process of these unlawful naked searches, which was frequently accompanied by severe violence, have the objective of inciting a feeling of humiliation and intimidation from those being searched, as concluded by Amnesty. In these cases, Amnesty International concluded that the context and the method in which these searches were

conducted may amount to the use of torture by the officials conducting the searches (Amnesty International, 2021).

Along with this, there have been many reports by human rights organisations, on the use of violence by Greek officials against those who are seeking asylum. Perhaps one of the most violent and horrendous periods in these turbulent times is in March of 2020, when the border region in Evros was opened by Turkey, amid heightened tensions with Greece. In this period there were allegations of violence at the hands of both Greek and Turkish border agents. Migrants who spoke the human rights organisations documented how they were pushed across the border by Turkish officials, in an intimidation tactic by the Turkish Government. In response to this opening of the land border, Greek border officials reacted violently to prevent migrants from reaching European and Greek soil. There was widespread coverage within the media of the use of tear gas and rubber bullets by Greek security forces to deter people from crossing the border. It has also been alleged that there was the use of live ammunition by Greek authorities, which amounted to the deaths of three migrants (BBC, 2020). This accusation against the Greek state has not been verified, although given the mounting evidence against the authorities it is not completely implausible.

There have also been reports of sexual assault by those perpetrating the pushbacks against women. Although this is not as widespread and systematic as other violent assaults occurring, it is happening at such a frequency that it has been recorded by several human rights bodies, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (HRW, 2020).

It is apparent that there is mounting evidence which is proving that the Greek state is engaging in systematic and organised pushbacks. These pushbacks are being enforced to prevent people from arriving in Europe to seek asylum. Along with the physical act of pushback and the traumatic experience of being denied your inalienable right to seek asylum, migrants have been subjected to extreme violence at the hands of authorities. This violence is unlawful and as has been shown by Amnesty International in their report, it in some cases amount to torture and inhumane or degrading treatment. In these incidents, this treatment of human beings cannot be attributed to a “few bad apples”. It is the case that this treatment of individuals is so dire and continuously inhumane, it is not implausible to conclude that there



have been orders to treat individuals attempting to seek asylum in this manner, to act as a deterrent to those who may attempt to enter Europe irregularly once again. This is not yet confirmed by government bodies, as any accusation of pushbacks against the Greek authorities has been continually denied. As they have been denied it is clear that any violence at the hands of those engaging in pushbacks has by de facto also been denied.

### **6.8 Deaths at the Borderzone**

Along with the violence which often occurs in conjunction with pushbacks in the Aegean Sea, at the hands of the Hellenic Coast Guard or Frontex, there have been worrying accusations of deaths at the borderzone between Greece and Turkey. During the period in which Turkey opened its border with Greece in 2020, there were unconfirmed but widespread allegations that the Greek authorities made use of live ammunition to deter people from crossing the border. According to news reports published by Human Rights Watch and the BBC, either three individuals or an individual man was killed by live ammunition after the Greek border guards opened fire at those attempting to cross the border (BBC, 2020), (HRW, 2020). Along with this incident, there have been accusations of the EU/Greek authorities being responsible for deaths along the border in an indirect manner. During the winter months with plunging temperatures, it is horrifyingly common for migrants to die due to exposure to extreme temperatures. This can occur due to people being soaked in the freezing waters of the Evros river during pushbacks and thus succumbing to hypothermia as is alleged with one individual (Daily Sabah, 2017) or from exposure as individuals are forced to lie and wait in extreme temperatures, to attempt to make the border crossing (InfoMigrants, 2019). In cases such as these, it is not at the direct hands of Frontex or the HCG which these individuals die, but it is the reinforcement of the wider system, that results in these deaths.

Finally, there have been widespread reports of migrants being abandoned at sea by those who are employed to protect them i.e., the coast guards, whether it is the Hellenic Coast Guard or Frontex. The human rights organisation Mare Liberum documents these pushbacks and the subsequent deaths which arise from them. Using testimonies of those who were pushed back and statements from the Turkish coast guard, they have been able to build an approximate number of those who have died as a result of these pushbacks. For the year 2020

Mare Liberum recorded 321 pushbacks in the Aegean Sea, which involved 9,798 people (Liberum, 2020). As the allegations of pushbacks are not officially confirmed as of the time of writing, it is thus difficult to confirm the allegations of enabling drowning against these actors. However, what has been confirmed is that Frontex is now using drones to survey the shores of the coast of Greece. The implication of this is that the obligation under international law to assist a boat that is in distress does not apply to unmanned aerial vehicles (drones in this case), so it is not a giant leap to presume that the authorities are turning a blind eye to vessels which are in distress containing migrants to prevent irregular migration and subsequently are somewhat culpable for the drowning of these individuals (McDuff, 2019).

## 6.9 Conclusion

This section has given an insight into the practices of pushbacks within the Aegean Sea. It has highlighted how pushbacks are being conducted and how the practice has evolved in recent years. Along with this, the organisation of Frontex has been examined and how this European actor, in conjunction with the HGC, have been illegally and inhumanely violating basic human rights and in their actions confirmed the borders of the EU. The human suffering in the form of the violent acts committed against those who are pushed back has been discussed along with the alleged deaths which have occurred as a result of this.

It is apparent that these practises are no longer being conducted covertly, as was shown in the cases in which those who are already in the process of applying for asylum are pushed back (i.e., land pushbacks). Along with this, it can be presumed that how these practices are almost always being conducted in the open is sending a clear message to Turkey from the Greek authorities. It can be concluded that this border control mechanism can amount to Greece engaging in CEM. Similar to the case with Turkey, Greece can be deemed an opportunist actor as they did not take part in the creation of these population flows.

However, it is being increasingly obvious that the Greek state, with the support of the EU, is manipulating these population flows to force Turkey to accept these displaced peoples. This is a manipulation tactic as it has a political dimension, as the Turkish state had originally agreed to keep the border with Greece secure. As Turkey is no longer fulfilling this obligation from the 2016 deal, Greece has resorted to manipulating population flows in an attempt to

coerce Turkey into ceding to its demands, which is to resume the prevention of migrants from entering Greek territory, along with accepting the returns of individuals in which Turkey has been deemed a third safe country for.

From widespread reporting and the proof in the form of various pieces of footage and photographs, it can be concluded that pushbacks are undisputedly being conducted by the HCG in conjunction with the EU organisation Frontex. Although venomously denied by official actors it is widely known that pushbacks are being used as a border control mechanism by the Greek state. However, given that the HCG have the support of the EU in the form of Frontex, it remains highly unlikely that they will be held accountable for these actions by the wider European Union. This coupled with sensationalised news reporting on irregular migration has generated public and political incentives to protect the European border at any cost. This is a prime example of the iron border, that reinforces itself through its implementation. Therefore, it seems unlikely that there will be enough public pressure placed upon these actors to change their practices anytime soon. This particular situation has enabled the Greek state, with the support of the EU, to engage in CEM against the Turkish state, without facing the consequences of being held accountable for these human rights violations.

Along with this, the increased use of pushbacks both on sea and land in recent years has further exacerbated the concept of a borderzone highlighted by Topak. As has been highlighted in the manner in which migrants' rights are suspended in the process of a pushback when their personal circumstances are completely disregarded and thus their eligibility for seeking asylum is not considered. Furthermore, with the increased proliferation of land pushbacks, it can be seen that the borderzones, although still most visible along territorial edges, are now penetrating deep within the state's territory. In these cases, individuals are removed from within Greek territory and forcibly transported to the border to allow for a pushback. Thus, the borderzone is now being expanded to include these inland regions where this is occurring. Finally, the increased surveillance of a borderzone is highlighted in the use of drones, which are used to mitigate the responsibility of coastguards to aiding people who are in distress.

## 7. Surveillance and Other Bordering Mechanisms

### 7.1 Outline

Now that the legislation and the processes of pushbacks have been adequately explained, this study shall now document other mechanisms which are utilised by Greek authorities to deter irregular migration and thus transcend the borders of Europe. This is done through the processes they enact to prevent people from reaching Greek soil, thus forcing them back into Turkish territory. It is this manipulation of refugee populations that allow them to attempt to force the Turkish state into accepting the displaced population.

Throughout my time on Samos, I became aware of the various developments in the sphere of border control in Greece. Some of these pieces of information I found through new sources and others I was made aware of through my organisation. We were made aware of the legislative developments as this directly affects the work of MOTG, as it was an NGO operating in the vicinity. When taking into account these small developments, a broader picture of the relationship between Greece, migration and the distribution of humanitarian aid becomes clear. It becomes apparent that not only is it becoming increasingly difficult to seek asylum within Greece for those who are vulnerable, but also that there is an increasing push to criminalise efforts by actors to support the refugee population.

This section shall outline the various physical mechanisms which have been put in place to prevent refugees from reaching Greece. Following this, the barriers put in place to prevent the distribution of humanitarian aid and the attempts to prevent the freedom of the press shall be discussed. Finally, this section shall discuss the recent developments to criminalise those who are seeking asylum within Europe.

### 7.2 Sound Cannon

The border region between Greece and Turkey has been under increasingly stringent surveillance in recent years. The region is now divided by a steel wall, which is similar to that found at the US-Mexico border, several sensors and long-range cameras which are equipped

with night vision. However, it was a recent development in early 2021 which caught the attention of the international media. In the early months of 2021, Greece unveiled plans to make use of an anti-migrant sound cannon. The cannon which can reach up to 150 decibels can cause profound and permanent hearing loss, having the same sound level as artillery fire. The cannon is to be used in the Evros region along the shared border with Turkey to deter those who aim to seek asylum in Greece.

The LRAD technology which is being used through the sound cannon was developed in the 2000s as a tool for the US Army. They are unlike regular loudspeakers in the sense that they can be targeted directionally and precisely. Following the use of this technology by the New York Police Department in 2017, a lawsuit was brought against the NYPD, in which the city settled for 784,000 dollars (Cockerell, 2021). This highlights how this technology has been deemed inappropriate in the use against civilians and yet the Greek Government deemed it appropriate to be used against asylum seekers in the Evros region. Given the fact that the sound cannon has the capability of causing severe injury in the form of hearing loss, there has been an inspection by the European Union commission. There were concerns from the EU Commission that the use of such technology would violate the right to dignity of those who were to be subjected to it. A spokesperson for the commission stated that although nations had the right to defend their borders, they must ensure that these measures must align with European fundamental rights including the right to dignity (AP News, 2021).

### **7.3 Other Surveillance Methods**

Along with this sound cannon, the borderzone between Greece and Turkey is under incredibly sophisticated and intense surveillance. This surveillance is perhaps at its most intense at the Evros land border in between the two nations. Along the sea border, there is the constant patrolling of both the Hellenic Coast Guard and the Frontex vessels, which are set to increase drastically in the coming years as discussed in the section regarding Frontex. However, along the land border, there has also recently been an increase in border control methods. The land border that Greece and Turkey share is 200km long and flows over the Evros river. The river separates Western Thrace in Greece from East Thrace in Turkey. In 2011 to deter irregular migration into Greece, construction of a fence between the two nations

began, funded by the Greek state. The project cost over two and a half million euros and was completed at the end of 2012 (Leivada, 2021). However, as irregular migration increased and tensions between the two nations became increasingly fraught the amount of border surveillance being used in the region has increased exponentially.

Presently the mechanisms in use to deter migration in the region include a forty kilometre, five-meter-high steel fence, cameras and radar. Construction is yet again underway in the region to increase the mechanisms in place to prevent entry into the Greek state. These mechanisms shall include drones, thermal imaging and sensors (France24, 2021). Along with this, there is also construction underway of eleven new pillars with cameras attached in the region. These cameras will allow for the monitoring and long-range radar of the activities within a range of 15 kilometres within Turkish territory. These are due to be completed sometime in 2021 (KeepTalkingGreece, 2021).

Along with the increased surveillance along the territorial edges of Greece, the construction of the five new MPRIC's on the Greek hotspots shall have a heavy emphasis on automated surveillance. The system which shall be put in place was unveiled as part of the "National Migration Strategy 2020-2021, Protecting Aegean Islands" and is called Centaur. The description of the new system is given as

*"an integrated digital system of electronic and physical security management placed inside and around the facilities using cameras and a motion analysis algorithm (AI Behavioural Analytics)"* (Petridi, 2021).

The system has been described as a method in which to ensure that the upcoming camps are "closed and controlled". Through this system, the entry and exit of residents to the camp shall be constantly monitored automatically (Petridi, 2021). Along with this, the camp shall be surrounded by a double, military-grade fence. These developments highlight how asylum seekers are further treated like criminals through the heavy surveillance they are subjected to.

#### 7.4 Registering an NGO in Greece

On the fourth of February 2020, the Greek government introduced a new law, which required NGOs operating with the migrant community in Greece to take part in a special registry for their employees and their partners. This new piece of legislation was introduced partly as a result of riots that occurred involving both the migrant community and Greek citizens. The intended outcome of this new law was that the Greek government has increased powers to regulate the number and the actions of humanitarian actors involved in the situation. However, this piece of legislation has been heavily criticized by human rights actors as the stipulation of this piece of legislation, is that it creates another barrier for people to access humanitarian aid in the region (Karaoulanis, 2020).

The repercussion of this piece of legislation is that NGOs cannot work within Greece without the permission of the government. This provides a strong incentive for NGOs to not speak out in a critical manner on the Greek authorities. For example, an NGO may fear that they may not be granted permission to register if they highlight the human rights violations which are occurring on Greek soil, with regards to living conditions within the camps or the practice of pushbacks by the Hellenic Coast Guard.

This has resulted in NGOs who are less vocal on advocacy becoming registered with far more ease than other NGOs who are more critical of the Greek government. For example, in section three the organisation of EuroRelief is discussed, as mentioned previously they have reportedly close ties with the Greek government, this has meant they have been granted access to both the outskirts and the official campgrounds with ease. Along with the ease of registering within Greece, NGOs who are less critical of the government are provided with easier access to the displaced population, for example, they can be granted access to work within the grounds of the reception centres and the outskirts surrounding the official camp. This law paves the way for the possibility of coercion or manipulation of NGOs by the Greek authorities. Therefore, there is another barrier created for the distribution of humanitarian aid within the region and de facto how the Greek authorities can attempt to suppress criticisms of the migration policies within the region (Karaoulanis, 2020). This move has been heavily criticised by many including the UN Special Rapporteurs and the Council of Europe's Expert

Council on NGO Law, which called for the Greek Government to revoke this decision; however, this has not occurred thus far (HRW, 2021).

### 7.5 Freedom of the Press

Another aspect that exists as a barrier to the improvement of human rights is the freedom of the press. Greece has had a turbulent history with relation to the freedom of the press, however, this has become increasingly strained in recent years. As mentioned, journalists are in general banned from border camps and when they are granted access, they are generally given a tour of the best areas which makes the exposure of the dire conditions on the ground difficult to document. In 2021 Greece was ranked at number 70 out of an index of 180 in which the Freedom of the press was measured by most free to least free by the organisation reporters without borders (RSF, 2021). This is part of a wider pattern of the criminalisation of NGOs in Greece. Along with the recent investigations into NGOs such as the Aegean Boat Report, which has been previously discussed, 33 foreign nationals and members of four NGOs were also arrested in September of 2020. Although none were convicted in this instance, it is part of a wider tactic of intimidation and creating a hostile environment for NGOs to operate in Greece (HRW, 2021). Another instance is the arrest of a journalist who was charged with “*facilitating the illegal stay of a foreigner in Greece*” after she allowed an asylum seeker, who was appealing his asylum decision, to stay with her in her home (Fallon, 2021). Along with this the Greek police have specifically targeted journalists who are reporting on the situation with regards to the Hotspots in the country. On the island of Lesbos police have limited the movement of journalists and used violent means to apprehend journalists from the German news agency Die Welt. This is coupled with violent acts against other journalists reporting on the island. In an article on the situation, Reporters Without Borders stated that the Greek police were violating press freedom and the right to information for the local and international public (RSF, 2020).

This silence on critiquing the government has reached such a level that employees of the ministry of immigration have been verbally prohibited from testifying as to the alleged practices of pushbacks by Greek authorities. Disciplinary action and criminal prosecution



were threatened by the Greek state's legal advisor, Eleni Pasamichalis, against those that were contemplating doing so (ADEDY, 2021).

This restriction on the freedom of the press has severely affected human rights bodies from reporting on cases of pushbacks. During my time on Samos we were advised by individuals with a legal background, in an informal manner, that if we were to witness a pushback to leave the vicinity immediately and not record the occurrence in any way. This had changed from previous advice to record any instance of pushbacks and to contact legal bodies providing support to refugees, immediately. This advice changed due to an increasingly brutal approach by the Greek authorities. As was discussed previously there has been an increasing tendency to criminalise the provision of humanitarian aid within Greece. This has reportedly also affected how the documenting of pushbacks is occurring. Along with the arrest of members of the Aegean Boat Report, who exclusively deal with the reporting of pushbacks, there have also been rumours of the detention of those who are witnessing and filming pushback occurrences. I originally heard of reports of this, after it was alleged that a Greek man had been arrested by authorities, after documenting a pushback on a beach in Samos. Several days after this occurred news reports of a man being charged with espionage and facilitating the illegal entry of third-country nationals appeared in Greek news (Athina984, 2021). There were enough similarities between the two incidents to conclude, with reasonable certainty, that both reports dealt with the same incident.

If Greek authorities are increasingly criminalising methods to hold them accountable for their actions it seems that it will be implausible anytime soon to hold them liable for their actions, if it is not possible to document these incidents. Therefore, it would appear that the only method to solve this issue is through international pressure. However, as discussed in the pushbacks section, the wider EU is also culpable for these incidents. Therefore, it is unlikely that there will be much pressure from government actors in this regard. It would appear that the responsibility is on civil society to generate enough political pressure to hold those responsible accountable for these incidents.

During my final days on Samos, an unusual incident occurred on the island concerning a pushback. On August 13<sup>th</sup> I became aware of reports that a boat containing asylum seekers had reached the island. The individuals on the boat had taken shelter in Zoodohos Pigi monastery to evade being pushed back by the HCG. They were advised to do so by the Aegean Boat Report, to ensure that there were witnesses of their arrival and thus the pushback of them would prove more difficult for the Greek authorities. After the police had sealed off the region and prevented members of various organisations from access to the new arrivals, the UNHCR was contacted. In an unusual step, the UNHCR Samos had travelled to the monastery and were granted access to the new arrivals, who were then transported to the quarantine area of the Vathy RIC (AegeanBoatReport, 2021). This is unusual in the fact that the UNHCR rarely involves itself directly with the Greek authorities in this manner. Since the UNHCR is such a large organisation with much political leverage, it can be assumed it was for this reason the Greek authorities granted them access to the arrivals. Unfortunately, this is a rare occurrence and if the UNHCR had not intervened, the individuals involved would have most likely been pushed back. However, this incident does highlight how it is not inevitable that these pushbacks will occur. With the right amount of pressure from bodies such as the UNHCR, it is perhaps possible to prevent these pushbacks from happening.

## 7.6 The Criminalisation of Seeking Asylum

There has been an increasing tendency to criminalise the methods and people who are attempting to enter Europe through irregular migration routes. This is discussed by Van Houtum and Bueno Lacey in their discussion of the three paradoxes of the EU, whereby it is a basic right to seek asylum in the EU but the physical act of entering the EU has been criminalised. In their paper, they highlight the difficulty in reaching Europe through their term the “paper border”. This paper border was introduced into Europe with the “*common Schengen list of visa-required countries*” (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy 2020). In the creation of this 2001 list, the EU created a sharp divide between wealthy countries and poorer, largely African and Muslim countries. It was through this that a large part of the world cannot access Europe regularly and thus those who need to seek asylum in Europe have little option other than to take irregular travel routes. However, reaching Europe irregularly has becoming an

increasingly difficult task due to the willingness of European courts to prosecute those who do so.

Several cases which highlight this shall now be discussed. Perhaps most horrendous and widely covered is that of a father who is currently waiting to be charged for the death of his son, who drowned off the coast of Samos after their boat got into distress. The 25-year-old man from Afghanistan had attempted to reach European soil with his young son after his asylum case had been rejected twice in Turkey. He feared deportation to Afghanistan and therefore attempted to make the journey to Greece to seek asylum in Europe. During the journey, the boat got into distress and the young boy drowned. The father is now facing up to ten years in prison charged with “child endangerment”. This case which initially occurred in November 2020 is considered the first where a parent has been charged with the death of a child who lost their lives, in an attempt to reach Europe. It marked the new and decidedly brutal approach by the EU to migrant shipwreck survivors (Becatoros, 2021).

Another method of criminalising the entry into Europe by asylum seekers is to charge people with human smuggling when they attempt to steer the boats they are in towards Greek soil while crossing the Aegean Sea. This is the case for one Somali asylum seeker who was sentenced to 146 years in prison after steering a boat he was in towards shore. This occurred after the boat had capsized and the man had little choice other than to take control or risk the drowning of all onboard (Wallis, 2021). Another case is that of a Syrian man sentenced to 52 years in prison, for entering Greece irregularly with his family to seek asylum, after arriving on the island of Chios (ECRE, 2021).

These incidents of criminalising seeking asylum have been heavily criticised by human rights bodies, however now that there exists precedence for the prosecution of these individuals, it would appear that this trend shall continue in the future. However, in situations such as these, it begs the question if all legitimate forms of entry into the EU have been criminalised, what options do asylum seekers have but to enter illegally?

Through this increasing criminalisation of migration through the various barriers put in place, the borders of the European Union are being confirmed and transcended by these various mechanisms. The process of applying for protection within the EU has deteriorated to such an extent that it can be deemed a game of luck. To be granted asylum an individual must

evade pushbacks, evade criminal prosecution for their irregular entry into Europe and hope that their asylum claim is treated fairly and impartially while remaining within the confines of a camp setting for the duration of the process of their claim, which can be as long as two years in some cases.

## 7.7 Conclusions

As Topak explains in his article:

*“While borders can no longer be located only at the edges of states, the case of the Greece–Turkey borders demonstrates that the practices and effects of the borders manifest themselves primarily at these territorial edges”* (Topak, 2014)

Although this article is seven years old at the time of writing, the arguments which Topak makes with regards to increased surveillance along the Greek-Turkish border are still highly relevant. If not even more relevant today with the increasingly stringent border mechanisms being put in place. Topak argues that the borderzone is a biopolitical space in which migrant lives are held hostage. The sophisticated surveillance mechanisms which Topak references in his paper are used as “political technologies”, have only gotten more sophisticated in recent years, considering the use of drones in the Aegean Sea and the planned implementation of Centaur in the MPRIC’s. Along with this the practice of pushbacks have become more prevalent and arguably inhumane since people are being removed from camps after residing in Greece for several months. Once again showing how the borders of Europe are being transcended and confirmed from the territorial edges of states into deeper inland regions.

The use of such methods as the sound cannon, cameras equipped with infrared and the construction of increasingly robust border walls or fences are all clear examples of what van Houtum & Bueno Lacy deem as the iron border. It is this iron border that is understood as a *“conscious performative power play, a geopolitical spectacle conceived as a public-relations’ strategy”* (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2019). It is through this highly visible and intimidating iron border that European border control practices reinforce the narrative that Europe must be protected from increased irregular migration and thus further criminalises

and stigmatises the displaced population. Simultaneous with this, the reinforcement of this narrative also increases public support for these mechanisms, in effect generating the validation required to continue these practices.

Along with this, the relationship between Greece and Turkey has continually deteriorated since this article was published. In Topaks article he references the collaboration between Greek and Turkish officials in the borderzone, however, due to recent developments, this is no longer the case. Therefore, it can be argued that the borderzone still exists in the manner in which Topak described it in 2014, but it also now is an arena in which CEM is being practised. As Greenhill showed in her 2016 paper, Turkey engaged in CEM as an opportunist actor, however, with the increased surveillance to prevent migration into Greece it can also be argued that Greece is also partaking in the role of an opportunist actor. Due to the heightened surveillance ongoing in Greece, migrants are being forced out of the region and into Turkish territory. Thus, this movement of people is being manipulated by the Greek authorities to force the Turkish state to accept this population.

## 8. Alternatives for the Future

During my internship, I saw first-hand what has been highlighted by many organisations and individuals for several years now. The EU migration policy has essentially failed. For those who are lucky enough to have been granted access to the Asylum procedure, they have been subjected to years of inhumane living conditions, hoping to be accepted in a system which was initially supposed to take several months at its longest. As stated by Van Houtum and Bueno Lacey “*instead of receiving them with the humanism promised by the preamble to its constitution, the EU’s atrocious refugee centres now leave undocumented migrants at the mercy of their own despair*” (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2019). Through state actors using migratory flows as manipulation tactics, the EU has allowed gross violations of human rights to take place within its territory. It is apparent that a solution must be found to curb the unnecessary suffering of thousands of individuals, at the hands of inadequate EU migration policy.

Perhaps the most immediate action which must be taken is the ceasing of the practice of pushbacks. The systematic use of pushbacks by Greek authorities and the subsequent involvement of the EU in the form of Frontex must be acknowledged, and the offending bodies must be held accountable for the violation of laws, human rights abuses and the suffering they have been inflicting on the displaced population. This is a complicated matter as Frontex is a European organisation and therefore the wider EU are to some extent also culpable for their actions. However, as was shown with the involvement of the UNHCR in a pushback incident on Samos, it is possible to prevent pushbacks from occurring. It would require a conscious and collaborative effort from civil society groups and powerful actors such as the UNHCR. It would also require mounting pressure from these bodies as well as a strong presence of powerful actors such as UNHCR in areas where pushbacks are known to be reoccurring, as what was shown in the incident at the Zoodohos Pigis monastery on Samos. Through these actions, it will be possible to end a practice that is consistently depriving vulnerable people of their rights, as well as in some extreme cases their lives.

Another major concern and problem which exists within the current asylum procedure is the vast waiting time that applicants must endure. It is in this long waiting period (sometimes several years which has been exacerbated due to the Covid 19 pandemic) that the mental health of those awaiting their decision suffers. There are cases of those who arrive as minors who wait for such an extended amount of time, for an age assessment, that they become adults during the waiting period. This results in these individuals not being able to avail of the services and allowances which are granted to minors. The system of applying for asylum must be shortened to two months at most. The shortening of the waiting period would vastly improve the mental health of applicants as it would lessen the time spent in a camp setting, as well as decrease the damaging feeling of living in a constant state of uncertainty. Taking this into consideration, it is also important to allow for a sufficient amount of time to ensure a thorough and fair assessment of an application. This would prevent the unjust decisions which are currently happening under the aforementioned fast track procedure.

As was mentioned in section five, the designation of Turkey as a third safe country is illogical and unjust for the majority of those who face the threat of deportation under this designation. The reasons for this have been previously mentioned, but the main cause for concern is the fact that Turkey is already hosting a large refugee population within its territory, and the danger of refoulment for Syrian and Afghan populations remains high.

Finally, the living conditions which currently exists in reception centres along the European border must be improved. These are vastly inadequate living conditions that are dehumanizing and further inflict trauma on individuals who have often experienced severe trauma on their journey to Europe. Along with this, the responsibility of hosting asylum seekers should not be limited to Greece. This responsibility should be spread equally across all member states, especially member states which have the financial capacity to do so.

This isolating and traumatic experience of living in these conditions will only be worsened in the planned opening of closed camps on the five hotspots in Greece. An alternative vision for refugee camps must be found. Along with the necessity of allowing asylum seekers to have access to basic and humane living conditions, such as clean running water and electricity, a major cause of tension is the relationship between local populations

and the camp population. In many of the hotspots such as Samos, the burden of having many thousands of migrants on a small island is unsustainable for the island's small population. Therefore, a concept for an alternative should be to foster better relationships between the local and migrant populations. This can aid in integration and lessen feelings of isolation and thus improve the mental health of both the migrant population and the local population. The unequal burden on smaller populations should be eased and therefore a larger number of smaller "camps" that can better cater to the needs of both populations should be implemented. Although this is vastly different from the current procedure which is in place, it is not completely unheard of. Small projects have been set up in recent years which allow for humane and dignified refugee camps. Examples of these shall be discussed below.

A prime example of this was the Pikpa Camp, which was a volunteer-run refugee camp for vulnerable refugees on the island of Lesbos. In the first open-aided refugee camp in Greece, Pikpa housed displaced peoples in wooden houses which were formerly a children's summer camp. By 2016 the camp was supporting 600 refugees a day and was run by local Greek residents, which resulted in a more harmonious relationship with the local population. During this period Greece was also enduring a severe economic crisis and therefore the camp also provided food support to the local population. The camp ran several projects such as the Pikpa Boutique which allowed the residents to access items such as free clothes in a shop environment. This is a common practice amongst NGOs in Greece, as it facilitates a humane and dignified approach to distributing goods to individuals who are in need. This camp was a prime example of a humane approach to border camps. However unfortunately the camp was shut down by Greek authorities in October of 2020 and the residents were forcibly transferred to the camp of Kara Tepe (Lesvos Solidarity, 2020).

Although border camps should be avoided as much as possible, there are situations in which they may be necessary. In situations such as these, they may follow the outlines such as the Pikpa camp or the camp of Kara Tepe. Kara Tepe was designed specifically for the most vulnerable individuals in a refugee camp. Individuals who were members of the LGBTQI community, pregnant women and minors. There was particular attention paid to give protection to children and victims of gender-based violence. The camp was equipped



with playgrounds, recreational areas for adults and community spaces. Three meals a day were delivered to each camp resident at their assigned prefabricated container, which is a more dignified approach to the food line system, which is in place in most camps in Greece, in which residents must wait for hours in a queue to receive a meal. Each prefabricated container was equipped with heat and air conditioning. Along with this, there were community kitchens put in place as well as community empowerment programmes run by the UNHCR (Oxfam, 2021).

However, after the burning of the largest camp on Lesbos, Moira, in September 2020, a new temporary camp was established called Mavrovouni. The conditions here are similar to the conditions in other overcrowded reception centres in Greece, such as the Vathy RIC. With severe overcrowding, it is mostly composed of emergency tents and offers little in the way of protection for vulnerable groups. In a highly criticised move, the Greek government closed Kara Tepe in April of 2021. Much of the Kara Tepe population was moved into the new temporary camp, with no protection offered to the most vulnerable groups (Bathke, 2021).

As has been highlighted here, the core issue which must be dealt with, with regards to refugee camps is the basic needs of the residents. However, once these core needs of food, electricity and security are dealt with, it is imperative to ensure that people have dignified and humane living conditions in which to survive. To lessen the mental strain of living in a refugee camp setting, the waiting times for those who are forced to live in them must be decreased drastically. Along with this, there must be a sense of safety and security and various projects to allow for respite for those who remain waiting.

## 9. Conclusions Limitations and Future Outlooks

This study was markedly influenced by the omnipresence of uncertainty. As I began this course during the height of the Covid 19 pandemic, I was aware that this would be a constant factor. However, after securing my internship I encountered much uncertainty and questions I had not anticipated being faced with. The question regarding whether to engage in interviews or whether indirect research would provide more fruitful was one which I spent much time debating. However, after consulting papers on the topic of ethics regarding interviewing vulnerable populations and discussions with individuals who had spent much time working in this field, I decided upon indirect research.

Regarding personal decisions on whether to partake in the construction of the new camp on Samos, I am satisfied with the decision I made not to partake in this project for the reasons I have documented in this study.

This study was somewhat limited by several factors, the Covid 19 pandemic prevented me from conducting more informal conversations with members of other NGO's, which may have allowed for the exposure to different perspectives and theories on the current situation. The ethical decisions I had made also prevented me from having an in-depth conversation with residents on their experiences with the Hellenic Coast Guard or Frontex, as this was a clear violation of the safeguarding code of conduct, I had signed as part of my internship. There also existed many language barriers, which perhaps limited my ability to derive secondary meanings from conversations regarding new arrivals and pushbacks with colleagues. Along with this due to the illegal nature of many of the occurrences I have documented in this paper, it was not possible to contact actors such as the HCG and Frontex and therefore I relied on the official statements of the heads of these organisations to provide their perspective.

After spending five months on Samos, I have been lucky enough to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation. I believe that with sufficient confidence I can confirm

that the EU is indeed using irregular migration as a weapon of *coercive engineered migration* in the borderzone between Greece and Turkey. Through the examination of events such as those which occurred on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, I believe the practice of CEM by Turkey as an opportunist actor was visibly shown. However, although this remains true, I believe that through the various events and legislations which have been discussed in this paper it can be stated that Greece, and the EU by association, are also engaging in coercive engineered migration. Through their practices of pushbacks, they are outwardly forcing the refugee population into Turkish territory. This practice is a manipulation tactic by the European actors, to attempt to force the Turkish state to accept the returns they had agreed upon in the 2016 Deal. In addition, the stipulation of designating Turkey as a third safe country further exacerbates this pressure to accept these migrants. These pushbacks are being conducted by sea and by land and almost always occur in conjunction with violence and occasionally result in the death of people who are merely attempting to avail of their right to seek asylum. The practice of land pushbacks has transcended the border of Greece, and thus the EU, so as encompass any region which contains the presence of migrants, as they can be detained and subsequently illegally deported.

Along with this, there exists an increasingly hostile environment for both asylum seekers and those actors who seek to provide aid to this vulnerable population. This hostile environment is produced through barriers placed against registering an NGO within Greek territory, increased attacks on the Freedom of the Press and the criminalisation of seeking asylum. This hostile environment allows for the mechanisms of CEM being used by the Greek authorities to be operated with minimal interference from their critics.

The increased surveillance in use both on the territorial edges of the Greek state, in areas such as the Aegean Sea and the Evros region, is confirming the concept of a borderzone as coined by Topak. The use of drones to monitor the activities on sea, the planned sound cannon and infrared cameras are all clear indications “*that sovereign territorial surveillance, practices of death and exclusion, and suspension of rights are all central aspects of biopolitical control*” which are increasingly prevalent along the territorial edges of Europe (Topak, 2014). This surveillance is not only confined to the edges of the Greek territory but

has also permeated within the state in the planned opening of the new MPRIC's which shall be under intense surveillance with the use of the Centaur, the partly automated security system. This environment shall outwardly treat those who are seeking asylum as criminals, with their entry and exit being tracked with the use of fingerprints, reducing the existence of migrants to "*mere biological entities deprived of political status*" (Topak, 2014).

The paper border as examined by van Houtum and Bueno Lacey is a fundamental flaw in the migration policy of the EU. As examined previously, this mechanism prevents a large portion of the world from gaining access to European Territory. In doing this, it thus prevents the regular entry of asylum seekers into the territory. The creation of irregular routes into Europe is therefore the only option left to those who have been excluded through the enforcement of the paper border. The iron border is also another barrier to a more humane migration policy, as previously examined, the iron border acts in such a way that it reinforces the narrative of the misguided need to "protect" European borders, which in turn increases support for these inhumane practises. These practices include the building of fences, walls, and the use of sound cannons. Finally, the use of border camps also serves to further stigmatise and marginalise an already vulnerable population, through their "zoo-like" implementation and their intrinsically isolating and exclusionary nature.

Unless there are drastic changes in the future it would appear that Greece and the wider European Union shall remain in a stalemate with the Turkish state, using refugees as a political tool in a back-and-forth game, in which no one achieves victory. The only result of this is the prolonged suffering of those who have been left with little other option than attempt to gain access through this broken system. They risk their physical and mental health in this process and many cases their lives.

However, as outlined in the previous section there is a possible alternative to this current reality. Powerful actors, such as the UNHCR, would have to take responsibility for engaging in situations regarding pushbacks to prevent the HCG and Frontex from executing pushbacks. With increased pressure, there would be little option but for the perpetrators to cease their illegal practises. If there existed a shared responsibility for the hosting of asylum seekers amongst all member states of the EU, especially those who have the financial

capacity, the pressure on the Greek state would be decreased. Along with this, shortened waiting periods, fair and just asylum decisions and humane living conditions for asylum seekers is imperative to decrease the suffering in the borderzone of Greece.

If this were to occur the need to engage in CEM by Greece and the wider EU would dissipate, as the refugee population would no longer contain the political power it currently exercises. Conversely, if migratory flows no longer have political power Turkey shall not have the leverage to engage in CEM.

This may seem implausible given the current reality, however, as situations such as this are constantly in motion. In the period since Greenhill published her 2016, the practices between the EU and Turkey have changed considerably. Although this has been for the worse, I am hopeful that the situation can change just as quickly for the better and so that a more humane and just migration policy shall be possible for the EU, which upholds the Geneva Convention of Human Rights.

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