FRONTEX
EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY

Our internal ref. SAM/FSC/2023
Your ref. Ares (2023)5542244

Mr Henrik Nielsen
Director of Directorate B –
Schengen, Borders & Visa
DG HOME, European Commission

Dear Mr Nielsen,

In reference to your inquiry, please see below the necessary elements for a concise reply to the written question [E-002353/2023]: "Offers to the Greek Coast Guard to deploy drones" submitted by MEP Özlem Demirel:

1. ***In how many maritime emergencies identified by Frontex on the basis of its own intelligence, has Frontex offered the deployment of a drone to the Greek Coast Guard and when did it do so in each case?***

   Based on Frontex records, since the beginning of the deployment in Greece with the Frontex Surveillance Aircraft (FSA) call sign Heron 2 (03/08/2022), there are no records of maritime emergencies that match the criteria referred in the question (own intelligence as the source of information and subject of offer for non-scheduled flight activity).

2. ***In how many maritime emergencies that have come to the attention of Frontex via Navtex or other channels, has Frontex offered the deployment of a drone to the Greek Coast Guard and when did it do so in each case?***

   Based on Frontex records, since the beginning of the deployment in Greece with the FSA call sign Heron 2, there is only one case that can be associated with the criteria (other sources and offer for non-scheduled flight activity).

   On the 13th of June 2023 Frontex offered the deployment of FSA HERON2 (earlier take-off then the planned one) or Eagle 1, to monitor a fishing vessel with an estimated number of people on board reaching 600. This vessel had been previously detected by FSA Eagle 1 on that same day (Aircraft that operates from Italy and serves Joint Operation Themis).

   The Agency became aware of this incident as it was part of the recipient list of a communication between the Rescue Coordination Centre of Italy and Greece.

3. ***In which of these cases did the Greek Coast Guard reject these offers and in which cases did Frontex consider this to be justified?***

   In the case previously mentioned, the communication made to the Greek authorities was not subject of reply before the escalation of the situation to the phase of distress (shipwreck).

   Worth to stress that, according to the applicable legal framework, the competence for the coordination of any state of emergency events, including the dispatch of rescue assets (aircrafts and or vessels) lies on the Rescue Coordination Centres established in the Member States.

Frontex does not have these competences assigned in its mandate neither does it have the competence to evaluate the way a Rescue Coordination Centre manages an emergency event, therefore the Agency is not in a position to assess if the absence of answer can be justified or not.

Yours sincerely,

Electronically signed

Hans Leijtens
Executive Director

Electronically signed on 05/09/2023 17:48 (UTC+02) in accordance with Article 11 of Commission Decision (EU) 2021/2121