

## Welcome to the European Union

### Visit to Moria First Reception Centre, Moria, nr. Mytilini, Lesvos, Greece 11th May 2014

In April 2013 we visited the “open” Pikaia camp that was provided by the municipality and run by volunteers on the Greek island of Lesvos. It closed earlier this year.

(<http://www.statewatch.org/news/2013/apr/02greece-mytilene-asylum-seekers.html>)

Just over a year later, on Sunday 11th May 2014, we went in search of the new ‘closed’ detention centre. We were to find that in addition to the current temporary detention ‘camp’ which we hoped to visit, the EU is funding the building of a new expanded detention centre, the Moria First Reception Camp, and it was to this we were directed by Greek friends.



Moria First Reception Camp is currently under construction. Housed in a former military base it is located in beautiful countryside, approximately 1km from the sea and 3kms from the town of Mitylini on the island of Lesvos.



The stated capacity of the existing camp on this site is 150, but it is clear that the new extended provision will hold many more people. When we visited we saw extensive building works which when complete will allow for the detention of hundreds of migrants.



The funding for this 'facility' is provided by the EU Returns Fund (75%) and the Greek government (26%).



The people to be 'housed' here are those who have travelled across the Mediterranean to seek asylum and/or work in the European Union, many of whom are picked up by the Frontex co-ordinated operations of Greek coastguard boats. Those people who make it to the island are the 'lucky' ones, as more than 20,000 people have died in the Mediterranean on such journeys over the last 20 years (Migreurop, IOM estimates). During our brief stay Frontex boats intercepted a dingy carrying 40 migrants attempting to cross over to Lesbos from Turkey. (<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/40-migrants-rescued-greece>)

It is said that people will be held in this 'camp' for one or two nights before being transferred to Athens. However the scale of the investment and the type of buildings being constructed indicate that the camp has the potential to act as a long term detention centre. The older buildings appear to be fairly standard military style housing in long, single storey buildings. The new constructions are of small prefabricated units, with roofs which appear to be made of metal.





Most of these units have bars at their small, high windows, which are too small and high for an adult to be able to see out of, let alone a child. A large part of the new camp looks as if it going to be permanent, with offices for admin and staff accommodation. At the back there are two gigantic steel storage drums (probably for water and oil).

The site is still under construction, but presents a chilling taste of what is to come and the claustrophobic conditions for migrants to be held there. For people who have committed no criminal offence, nor been charged with any, it is impossible to see why barred windows, prison-style lighting and surveillance towers and barbed wire are necessary on this island camp. One can only wonder at the horror they will feel and experience on being taken to this place after their arduous journeys.

It has been reported by Migreurop that two days after our visit, on Tuesday 13th May, the Prime Minister of Greece visited Lesvos port (Mytiline), to express his solidarity ..... with Frontex..

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Photographs by John Moore.