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# CCBE *Info* Special Edition

## European Lawyers in Lesbos

### EDITORIAL - A HELLISH WORLD

The beginning of the 21st century is strangely similar to the beginning of the previous one.

In Aleppo, there are massacres being carried out with total impunity, as democracies watch helplessly and in horror. People are silently murdered in Yemen, far away from the hustle and bustle of cameras or from the interested support of certain democracies. People are being decapitated and stoned in Raqqa, and shown on social networks and the Internet for mere propaganda purposes. People are detained in Turkey, with the country turning into a detention camp for refugees, with the support of the European Union.

International law seems powerless. The United Nations has once again become a laughing stock, a *machin* ("thing"), as Charles de Gaulle, former President of the French Republic, once said. Nationalism, always threatening and warlike, seems - in many European countries and around the world - to triumph in every vote, be it elections or referendums.

Some lawyers do not escape such national selfishness, which seems to overwhelm all ideas. Nevertheless, most lawyers continue to believe in the law, and try to humanise globalisation.

The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe is carrying out, with the DAV (the German Bar) its project European

lawyers in Lesbos. Every week, lawyers from all over Europe go to the Moria detention centre on the island of Lesbos to provide advice. They are eagerly awaited by refugees who have no other access to law and justice. Lawyers work under difficult conditions. Since July 2016, three fires have occurred. But volunteers willing to provide such aid continue to arrive. Lawyers are getting together because they are aware of the need to defend the fundamental rights of thousands of refugees from Africa and the Middle East who land daily on the European coast. They know that hundreds are dying, carried away by the sea. They know the issues of the most vulnerable. Many children come alone, without any help, and sometimes are immediately picked up by networks engaging in forced labour or organ trafficking. Many women have been sexually assaulted during their journey and forced by criminal networks to engage into prostitution.

Europe cannot take in all the misery in the world. But this same Europe, rich and prosperous in comparison with other parts of the world, must take its share and provide refugees with the necessary humanitarian aid. European jurisdictions will continue to strengthen Europe as a legal area of protection and asylum. These jurisdictions will need lawyers to help them build the Europe that we love.

Michel Benichou  
CCBE President

## EUROPEAN LAWYERS IN LESVOS - REPORT FROM THE GROUND

The past few months have witnessed the European Lawyers in Lesvos project moving from its initial establishment phase to full implementation. During this period, the project has substantially increased the number of individuals seeking international protection it has assisted. We have now advised over 550 individuals in the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, Lesvos, with a focus on providing first instance asylum interview advice. With the recently-announced expansion of the project, we will be able to reach many more.

At the same time, the need for the kind of assistance provided by the project has become more profound. There are officially almost 5,000 people in Moria and the environment there is very difficult. Thousands of people – including hundreds of women and children – are living in small tents during the cold winter months. They feel frustrated with the conditions and the slow asylum process. They believe that Europe has turned away from them. In this context, the provision of pro bono legal aid from expert asylum lawyers from across Europe is crucial.

Other than the European Lawyers in Lesvos project, there is effectively no other organisation providing legal assistance to these individuals prior to their asylum interview. If it were not for our project, almost all of them would have to navigate the complex asylum process without any legal guidance and would go into their asylum interview without having spoken to a lawyer. Our project therefore plays a very important role and its value is recognised by other organisations – for example, we regularly receive referrals from all the major NGOs and agencies operating in Moria.

During the last six months, I have welcomed 27 volunteers to Lesvos as part of the European Lawyers in Lesvos project.

All of them have worked extremely hard and have been extraordinarily committed to the project – working very long hours and weekends in often difficult conditions.



The project has benefited greatly from such a wide diversity of viewpoints and expertise – in this, our project is unique: no other project can draw upon the skills, knowledge and experience of so many expert legal minds. All have contributed immensely whilst in Lesvos and very often continue helping when they return home. They have been excellent ambassadors for the project and for Europe more generally - it has been a privilege to work with them and they are a credit to their Bar Associations and to our profession.

Philip Worthington  
Project Coordinator, European Lawyers in Lesvos

## EUROPEAN LAWYERS IN LESVOS - A SUCCESS FOR THE EUROPEAN LEGAL PROFESSION

This past winter, people witnessed a Syrian woman climbing a container in the Moria reception camp, exclaiming “They do not give me access to a lawyer”. With this in mind, representatives of the CCBE and DAV (German Bar Association) have – led by the CCBE migration committee’s chair David Conlan Smyth from Ireland – quite quickly established the project. This would not have been possible without our project manager Phil Worthington, who is not only our manager in charge of the operations in Lesvos, but who is also the ambassador of *European Lawyers in Lesvos* in the humanitarian aid community.

I had a chance to visit the project in November 2016, and it was great to see how Phil Worthington and the volunteers really make a difference to the people stranded in Lesvos. The advice which the project volunteers from all over Europe provide them with is often quite simple, very initial advice. But as we all know it is the beginning of a case in which the course is set and in which serious mistakes can be made. The need for legal advice was noticeable in Moria; that’s why we now have more volunteer lawyers in Lesvos at the same time.

The project itself is to end after July 2017. What is crucial now is to see to it that the experience, the network and the reputation we have gained with the project will not be lost, although we know that our aid is only a drop in the ocean. But there is more; we have learned – and other humanitarian organisations might have realised through the work of our volunteers, too – that legal advice by independent lawyers is an integral part of humanitarian emergency aid. This applies not only to the refugee situation, but to many emergency situations. To advocate for this is an overarching goal for the DAV, besides supporting the *European Lawyers in Lesvos* itself.

Cord Brüggemann  
CEO of Deutscher Anwaltverein (German Bar Association)



We have provided assistance to over **525** individuals

From **31** different countries



**27** volunteers

From **10** different European countries



## CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

We are now accepting applications for **January until July 2017**.

The team in Lesvos consists of lawyers from European countries based on a roster for short term missions (minimum three weeks). These lawyers work on a pro bono basis, though their expenses are covered. Their role is give legal advice to migrants requiring international protection and send weekly reports on their activities. They are supported by ground staff engaged on a longer-term basis in order to ensure more permanent support for the project.

Lawyers who wish to participate in the project should meet the following criteria:

- **Able to spend a minimum of three weeks in Lesvos;**
- **Training and/or experience in Asylum Law and the law of international protection;**
- **Proficiency in English required (this will be assessed).**

For any further information, please contact [info@europeanlawyersinlesvos.eu](mailto:info@europeanlawyersinlesvos.eu).

You can download the application form [here](#).

## SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

European Lawyers in Lesvos would not be possible without the generous contributions of the following Bars and Law Societies:

Andorra Bar, Avocats.be, Flemish Bar, Nederlandse Orde van Advocaten bij de Balie te Brussel, Supreme Bar Council of Bulgaria, Czech Bar, Danish Bar & Law Society, Finnish Bar Association, Conseil National des Barreaux, Conférence des Bâtonniers, Grenoble Bar, Lyon Bar, Rennes Bar, Paris Bar, Strasbourg Bar, Seine-Saint-Denis Bar, Law Society and Council of the Bar of Ireland, Consiglio Nazionale Forense, DAV, BRAK, Liechtenstein Bar, Lithuanian Bar Association, Norwegian Bar, The Polish Bar of Legal Advisers, Ordem dos Advogados Lisboa, UNBR, Spanish Bar, Swiss Bar, Ordine degli avvocati del Cantone Ticino, Ordre des avocats Vaudois, Dutch Bar, Law Society of Scotland, Bar Council of England and Wales, Law Society of Northern Ireland, Fédération des Barreaux d'Europe.

We also wish to thank the following organisations:

