



Dear Mrs. Jourova,

World Refugee Day... Does it ring a bell? Europe is erecting walls all over the place and closed a disturbing deal with Turkey. We think about Migration Compacts, to quell the burning desire of Africa to migrate to Europe. Some are only too content that their "pushback" is working. Yet the misery in our own backyard is far from over.

Did you know that since the beginning of this year, almost 40% of the newly arrived refugees are children? Every month, increasingly more children younger than 12 add to the masses of the desperate. You should see them, with their hollow eyes. They stick to you, don't want to let go, as if they never want to return to these "detention centers". Can you imagine: your own child being detained in an impersonal camp, without mom or dad? In Greece alone, more than 200 children live in closed centers because there's no place for them in regular facilities. No medical support, no education, no basic accommodation. Are you surprised that 20 to 30% of them start suffering from mental pressures? That 10.000 children are missing because they prefer to run away, rather than to rot away in a center without perspective?

But do you care, Mrs. Jourova? Your staff is working well; they know what to do and are aware of the painful urgency. But when it reaches your level, the machine seems to grind to a halt. The order of the day quickly takes over again. The Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors (designed to cover 2011-2014) has been wrapped up more than a year ago. We don't see the follow-up coming through as a matter of urgency. Despite the many pleas from the European Parliament. We have Migration Compacts, Turkish Deals and Valetta Plans to fill up libraries. But we still lack a holistic approach and a focused solution for the thousands of helpless children. Member states anxiously cling to their national authority, and "forget" the children as soon as they cross the border.

We have been asking, pledging, for quite a while. Common sense and an approach that imposes the several levels to co-operate: the sooner the better now. It can't be that difficult to adapt a plan to reality? Certainly not when you realize that this refugee crisis quickly becomes a children's crisis. Hence a crisis of our moral sense. Freewheeling and declaration politics have had their time: push the member states to share information, use Europol to the max. Allow me to ask some question, Mrs. Jourova. To zoom in on the most burning issues at hand:

1. When can we expect a powerful and comprehensive answer to this heartbreaking situation?
2. What will you do to strengthen EU laws on reception conditions for unaccompanied children in every member state?
3. How do you intend to regulate and standardize guardianship for unaccompanied children in Europe?
4. How many children (unaccompanied, separated or within families) are accommodated in the hotspots in Greece and Italy? Can you provide detailed numbers per hotspot?
5. How do you guarantee the safety of these vulnerable children, so that they don't fall prey to these inhuman smugglers?
6. How will you - finally - make sure there are no more children disappearing from the reception centers?

As you can see, Mrs. Jourova: many questions we sincerely believe you are able to answer. We agree it is demanding. But this is about children. Unaccompanied, scared, disoriented refugee children. Not about sacks of cement that do enjoy freedom of movement throughout Europe.

Hilde Vautmans