

Statement – COVID-19

Considering the situation of a public health emergency resultant from the spread of the coronavirus and the current extraordinary burden being faced by the national health services, as well as due to the extraordinary commitments being made by the public sector, for the care and assistance to COVID-19 patients, it is presently not possible to ensure the availability of a “safe place” on the Maltese territory, without compromising the efficiency/functionality of the national health, logistic and safety structures, which are dedicated to limiting the spread of the contagious disease, as well as to provide assistance and care to COVID-19 patients;

Considering that any persons rescued at sea, who may also be suffering from the COVID-19 contagious disease, must be protected from any threats to their life, and also must have their primary needs fulfilled including access to fundamental services in terms of health, logistics and transport;

Considering also that the Maltese authorities have already ordered the closure of the airport and ports for passenger traffic;

Considering the necessity to provide the proper balance between the control over the Maltese territory and the compliance with Malta’s international obligations whilst addressing this public health emergency including the enforcement of effective measures already put in place for the containment of the spread of contagious disease adopted so far, whilst taking into account the involvement of the law enforcement officers primarily the Armed Forces of Malta, the Police Force and the Civil Protection Department whose resources are all focused on combating the spread of this contagious disease;

Considering that, following the declaration of a public health emergency issued by the Superintendent of Public Health in terms of the Public Health Act and in order to counter the spread of the contagious disease, it is necessary to ensure the taking of the appropriate and proportionate measures to prevent additional risks of contagion.

THEREFORE, in the light of the magnitude of these pressures, it is considered that the Maltese authorities are not in a position to guarantee the rescue of prohibited immigrants on board of any boats, ships or other vessels, nor to ensure the availability of a “safe place” on the Maltese territory to any persons rescued at sea. The authorities will be communicating this statement to the European Commission.