

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002258/24
to the Commission
Erik Marquardt (Verts/ALE)
(24 October 2024)**

Subject: Politically motivated trial against Doros Polykarpou in Cyprus

On 15 October 2024, Doros Polykarpou, a human rights defender and founder of the Cypriot NGO KISA, was set to go on trial for the misdemeanours of illegal entry and insulting and assaulting two security guards in relation to a 2022 visit to the Pournara First Reception Center. ⁽¹⁾ His complaint of assault by security guards was dismissed, and he now faces a three-year prison sentence. KISA and Polykarpou have long been targets of violent attacks, legal action and threats, including death threats, for their criticism of Cyprus' policies and practices regarding the rights of migrants and refugees, and earlier this year KISA's office was the target of a bomb attack. There are concerns that the trial is unfair and politically motivated, exacerbated by its recent postponement to February 2025 after the prosecutor failed to provide Polykarpou's defence with requested evidence.

1. The bombing of the KISA office ⁽²⁾ poses a lethal threat to the work of activists and human rights defenders. What does the Commission intend to do to protect such work from criminal acts?
2. In 2022, Mr Polykarpou was investigating deplorable conditions in the Pournara First Reception Centre. What steps does the Commission plan to take regarding the allegations that asylum seekers are being held in inhumane conditions?
3. Is the Commission aware of any other human rights defenders or activists facing repercussions for similar work in Cyprus and, if so, which cases are those?

Submitted: 24.10.2024

**Answer given by Mr Brunner on behalf of the European Commission
(16 January 2025)**

1. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders play a key role in upholding fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Commission is firmly committed to defending the core EU values and ensuring a safe and enabling environment for civil society.

The Commission is aware that the Kisa Migrant and Refugee Center (KISA) in Cyprus was attacked on 5 January 2024. The former Commissioner for Home Affairs had a dedicated meeting on 9 January 2024 with civil society organisations, including KISA, on civil society role in migration management. The Commission referred to the attack in the chapter on Cyprus in the 2024 Rule of Law Report ⁽¹⁾.

2. The Commission has provided significant support to Cyprus to strengthen migration management, both financially and operationally together with the relevant EU Agencies, based on a memorandum of understanding signed in 2022 ⁽²⁾. Such support helps Cyprus to step up efficiency and efficacy of procedures and infrastructures in line with the EU acquis, including EUR 22 million for the upgrade of Pournara First Reception Centre (FRC). While in 2022 Pournara FRC was overcrowded due to high arrivals, the situation has improved. Further improvements are expected once the reconstruction of Pournara FRC is completed, and with the increase of capacity for asylum seekers at Kofinou reception centre and the construction of the new reception centre in Limnes.
3. The Commission is in continuous contact with civil society organisations and human rights defenders, including in Cyprus, and is concerned about the pressure they face in some Member States. Engagement with civil society actors is a crucial part of the implementation process of EU law and policies, including the Pact on Migration and Asylum in all Member States.

¹ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-doros-polykarpou-trial-possibility-imprisonment>.

² <https://cyprus-mail.com/2024/01/05/kisa-offices-destroyed-in-apparent-attack/>.

⁽¹⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/a3e5a6f3-2dc4-403a-94ea-af42177813e9_en?filename=31_1_58067_coun_chap_cyprus_en.pdf
⁽²⁾ 8 C(2022) 1129 final.