

Press release: Extra Border Force cutter to support search and rescue in Aegean

Prime Minister Theresa May has today announced that an additional Border Force cutter will be deployed to the Aegean to assist with vital search and rescue operations which have already saved more than 13,000 lives.

The Prime Minister made the announcement at a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras in Downing Street. The leaders are expected to discuss ways in which to strengthen co-operation on managing illegal migration and enhance efforts to implement the EU-Turkey statement in the face of continuing migratory pressures. The EU-Turkey statement, signed in March 2016, is a key part of the strategy to tackle illegal migration in this region. The agreement aims, through returns, to break the link between making the illegal and dangerous journey across the Aegean and remaining in Europe.

In addition to the cutter, it was also announced that the UK will be providing additional interpreters to ease pressures on the Greek islands and support the most vulnerable.

Aside from the search and rescue role, cutters and their crew are ideally placed to spot signs of organised immigration crime, which can provide vital intelligence for law enforcement partners.

Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes said:

Today's announcement is a strong symbol of the will of both governments to work together to tackle the challenges posed by illegal migration and maintain the momentum of the EU-Turkey agreement.

It builds on the vital humanitarian work already carried out by Border Force cutters in both the Mediterranean and the Aegean, often done in extremely challenging circumstances.

The meeting between the two prime ministers today is just the start of a process which will develop specific areas of co-operation, supported by an action plan which I will be taking forward.

At the EU-Turkey summit held on 7 March 2016, the UK agreed with EU leaders and Turkey that all illegal migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey. In return, the EU agreed that for every Syrian readmitted by Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian from Turkey would be resettled in the EU. The implementation of the statement has contributed to the significant reduction of flows in the eastern Mediterranean and its ongoing effective implementation remains vital to see

lasting impact in this region.

The additional Border Force cutter will work alongside HMC Valiant which was deployed to support the search and rescue operation 'Op Poseidon' in May 2015, as part of an agreement with the Hellenic Coast Guard.

Border Force cutters are equipped with maritime radar and rigid hulled inflatable boats (RHIBs) and are capable of rescuing several migrant boats at the same time, with sometimes over 200 people rescued in a single mission. Cutters are just one part of the Border Force maritime capability which protects the UK coastline. In UK waters, Border Force also has a fleet of coastal patrol vessels, which are used to patrol ports and marinas.