

Greece to speed up creation of migrant holding centers to ease tension

ATHENS (Reuters) – Greece plans to accelerate the creation of detention centers on its outlying islands in the Aegean Sea after a backlash against overcrowded camps by some migrants and nearby residents.

Authorities said on Monday they would proceed with the purchase of land on the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos, and press ahead with plans to create holding facilities on state-owned land on Kos and Leros.

Thousands of migrants are waiting on the islands for their asylum applications to be processed, most of them in overcrowded camps known as reception centers.

Migrants on the island of Lesbos protested last week against poor living conditions and residents of the island took to the streets demanding the reception facilities close.

“The government has decided to close today’s anarchic facilities and create controlled closed facilities,” government spokesman Stelios Petsas said in a statement.

Hundreds of thousands of people crossed into Europe from Turkey via Greece in 2015 and 2016, until a deal brokered by the European Union limited the flow. There has been a resurgence in arrivals since around September 2019.

Greece’s conservative New Democracy government, elected last July, has taken a tougher stance toward migration than Syriza, the leftist party that led the previous government.

The government has introduced new regulations which it says will simplify the asylum process and launched a tender for a floating fence in the Aegean which it hopes will deter migrants arriving from Turkey on rafts.

The new detention centers would house new arrivals until their asylum processes were underway, as well as others showing “delinquent behavior” or not entitled to

asylum, Petsas said.

Entering and leaving the facilities would be strictly regulated and they would be closed at night, he added.

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