**Press Release - Pushed Back at the Door**

Prague, 25 January 2017

The report **Pushed Back at the Door: Denial of Access to Asylum in Eastern EU Member States** presents the situation asylum-seekers often face at the eastern borders of the EU. The picture shown of Europe’s response to the biggest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War is rather grim as presented by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (Bulgaria), Organization for Aid to Refugees (Czech Republic), Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Hungary), Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland) and the Legal-informational centre for NGOs (Slovenia), all members of ECRE – a pan-European umbrella organisation of refugee assisting NGOs. Increased border controls and the construction of physical and legal barriers restricting access to protection for people fleeing war and terror characterize this ‘scary new’ reality. Country responses cited in the report range from violent push-backs, through the denial of entry to proposed legislative changes restricting access to protection.

Often forced migrants falling victims of violent push-backs have trouble understanding their fate in Europe as it does not correspond to their expectation. As an unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan put it: ‘this is not Europe’ after having been violently pushed back from Hungary to Serbia. Another refugee - a torture-survivor from Sri Lanka said to his visitors in a Prague prison: ‘I have never committed any crime’ – after being denied the possibility to ask for asylum at the Prague airport.

Martin Rozumek, Head of the Czech Organization for Aid to Refugees (OPU) commented on the release of the report: *“Visegrad countries and countries on the Balkan route often argue that refugees do not want to settle, relocate or even integrate in their countries. However, at the same time they do not hesitate to breach the EU and international law at their borders in order to prevent access of refugees into the asylum procedures.* *It is necessary to establish functioning internal and external monitoring of the border guards ´conduct in our countries*”.

