

Summary

In response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, the Government of Greece (GoG) offered the use of two Greek cruise ships on September 3. DHS quickly accepted the offer, which State conveyed to Embassy Athens via cable on September 4. The acceptance was conveyed by the Embassy to the GoG the same day. According to the GoG, the estimated date of the first ship's arrival in U.S. coastal waters was October 1. During September 5 – 8, State and Embassy Athens provided the GoG, Majestic International Cruisers (the first ship's owner), and the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office with contact information to resolve safety concerns about the vessel. We are unaware of the results of these discussions or when/if they occurred. On September 11, the GoG revised its offer; instead of offering two smaller ships it would offer one larger vessel that could depart Crete on September 20, with ETA in New Orleans on October 10. DHS/FEMA declined the GoG's offer on September 15, on the grounds that the ship would not arrive in a timely manner. This decision was unofficially passed to the GOG and an appropriately worded response officially declining the offer is being drafted.

Timeline

Sept. 03 - DHS accepts offer of Greek ships and requests that they start sailing toward United States. (09/03/05 09:24 DHS e-mail to FEMA and TF 1)

Sept. 04 - State cables acceptance of offer of ship to Embassy Athens.
(State 163374)

Sept. 04 - Embassy Athens conveys to GoG the USG's acceptance of ships.
(Athens 2305)

Sept. 05 – GOG advises Embassy Athens that first ship, which accommodates 500 people, can arrive at the Gulf Coast around October 1 and stay until March 2006. GoG is concerned that the ship's sprinkler system may not meet IMO standards and plans to request U.S. Coast Guard approval or exemption. Embassy Athens requests U.S. Coast Guard point of contact for GoG (Athens 2306)

September 07 -- State identifies Coast Guard POC and notifies him the first ship will be in Dover, England around September 25 and can be in New Orleans 10-12 days later
(09/07/05 12:29 Greek desk/Embassy Athens email)

Sept. 08 – State notifies Embassy Athens and vessel's owner of relevant USCG POC. State alerts USCG Marine Safety Office of need for waiver regarding ship's sprinkler system. State's understanding is that the USCG Marine Safety Office would work directly with the ship's owner to sort out clearance. (09/08/05 11:09 Greek desk/Embassy Athens email)

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Sept. 11 - GoG revises offer from two smaller ships to one larger vessel accommodating 650 passengers and 400 vehicles. Vessel could depart Crete around September 20, with ETA in New Orleans on October 10. (Athens 2372, 2383)

Sept. 14 - USAID learns the ship has not yet left Greece.
(USAID/DHS/FEMA email 09/14/05 13:56)

Sept. 15 - DHS/FEMA declines GOG offer of cruise ship.
(USAID/DHS/FEMA email 09/14/05 13:56)

Sept. 15 - Task Force confirms with Embassy Athens that ship will be declined
(Task Force/Embassy Athens email 09/15/05 16:47)

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