

## The EU-Turkey Migration Deal One Year On

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18 March marked the one-year anniversary of the controversial EU-Turkey migration deal. The deal was designed to deliver an immediate result to the EU to stop the flow of migrants and serve domestic agendas. Turkey would take back or keep almost all the refugees and, in return, the EU would deliver the long-promised – but never delivered – visa free travel for Turkish nationals to the Schengen zone, 3 billion euro in financial assistance to help support the some 3 million refugees living in Turkey and reinvigorate Turkey's beleaguered EU accession negotiations. However, with rising concerns over human rights, along with increased tensions in Turkey-EU relations there are concerns that the deal may collapse any time.

While the deal has not totally stopped the flow of refugees, it has helped to reduce the numbers. Arrivals to the Greek islands in the first part of 2016 were some 150.000. Following the implementation of the deal the number dropped to 20.000 (for the entire year). Consequently the number of deaths in the Aegean also significantly dropped. According to the Turkish Coast Guard, the number of asylum seekers caught crossing the Aegean Sea fell by 85 percent since the deal was agreed. Clearly, this was not simply a result of the deal but also a result of the closed Balkan route. However, while the deal may have stemmed the flow of refugees, some elements – not least related to human rights – remain extremely contentious. A new report from Amnesty International entitled 'The EU-Turkey deal: Europe's year of shame' slams the agreement.

Once the EU had outsourced the 'problem' to Turkey, interest from Member States to fully implement the deal dropped. Beyond the issue of resettlement, the situation of the refugee camps on the Greek islands and mainland presents evidence of this. Greece has been left in a totally untenable position with insufficient solidarity and support from fellow Member States. Unfortunately, the rise of populism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment is putting pressure on Member State leaders, as well as liberal values themselves. Despite valiant efforts from the Greek authorities and empathy from Greek society, Greece has found itself swamped and unable to provide the necessary infrastructures and assistance to the refugees. According to the Refugee Rights Data Project, refugees' human rights have been breached because they do not have access to a standard of living adequate for their personal security, health and wellbeing. The EU has not offered enough support to the Greek government. It gives the impression that the other 27 Member States just want to outsource their moral responsibility. This approach needs to change immediately.

Hosting 3 million refugees has been a huge economic and social challenge for the Turkish authorities and will continue to be so. According to government figures, Turkey has spent more than €20 billion caring for the refugees. In this sense, the money promised by the EU is a drop in the ocean. Turkey has long complained that the EU has failed to sufficiently share the burden in looking after the refugees. And Ankara is right. Despite the deal, there has been hardly any resettlement of refugees from Turkey. A recent report by the European Commission shows only 3.565 Syrians were taken from Turkey while 1.487 refugees who reached the Greek islands were sent back to the country. Indeed, the EU's response to the world's greatest refugee crisis in 70 years has been appalling. With the crisis used as a political tool for the far right and populist groups, Turkey has played on Member State fears, finding itself possibly for the first time since the Cold War, when the country was key to shoring up Europe's security, in a powerful position in its relations with Europe.

Over the past year, Turkey has continuously threatened to cancel the deal. This is usually linked to the EU's failure to deliver visa-free travel. However, other issues come into play now too. Turkey threatened to scrap the deal after a Greek court refused to return eight soldiers allegedly linked to the 16 July 2016 failed coup attempt. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu also recently threatened to cancel the deal amid the recent diplomatic crisis with the Netherlands and Germany. Turkey became embroiled in a row with both countries after Turkish ministers were prevented from making campaign appearances ahead of Turkey's 16 April constitutional amendment referendum. Turkey's response, accusing both states of Nazism and fascism has cranked up tensions to unprecedented levels.

Turkey's anti-EU narrative has increased in the run-up to the April referendum which could result in Turkey's governance system shifting from a Parliamentary system to an Executive Presidency. Hence, the increase in heated narrative from Ankara is aimed not just at putting pressure on the EU but also to drum up support for the 'yes' campaign.

If Turkey did end the deal, it would very likely bring about an increase in the flow of migrants to the Greek islands, thereby placing Greece in a totally impossible situation as long as the Balkan route remains closed. Yet despite the narrative of the Turkish authorities, we should not be too quick to believe that Ankara is ready to pull the plug because by doing so, Turkey would gain nothing but rather lose leverage that it has on the EU. Unfortunately, as Kemal Kirisci from the Brookings Institute writes in his recent commentary 'immigrants and refugees are being instrumentalised for a political struggle that that seems to recognize no bounds'. This is truly shameful.