



THE REFUGEE DEAL BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: REQUEST TO RENEW THE DEAL

The conflict between the regime forces and the opposition that took place in Syria in 2011 turned into a civil war, causing one of the largest migration flows in recent history. Millions of Syrians, who are forced to leave their homes for security reasons, migrate to safe areas within the country, to neighboring countries and even to various European countries. If we express this migration wave in numbers, while more than 6.6 million people migrated to other regions within the country, as of May 19th 2021, a total of 5,602,649 Syrians reside abroad, registered in the data of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Of these, 3,671,625 (65%) live in Turkey, while Lebanon and Jordan host 855,172 and 665,834 Syrians, respectively. It is known that during this forced migration; more than 1.2 million Syrian immigrants reached the countries in the European continent through illegal ways. In this regard, the European Union (EU) has carried out the negotiation process with Turkey on the establishment of a certain legal system of irregular migration and signed the Refugee Deal on March 18th 2016. During this migration process, the Turkey-Greece route was used as the main artery until March 20th 2016.

If we remember the subjects of the deal, Turkey will prevent irregular migration flow towards the EU through its own territory by increasing border controls. If the individual asylum requests of irregular migrants that arrive to Greece from Turkey are not accepted they will be returned to Turkey. According to a one-to-one format for every Syrian migrant that returned to Turkey, a Syrian migrant who resides in Turkey will be resettled in one of the EU countries. A total of 6 billion Euros of financial aid would be provided to Turkey by the EU to meet the needs of Syrian refugees. The first 3 billion Euros of this amount had to be allocated by the end of 2016, and the other 3 billion Euros were to be allocated in 2018. On the other hand, if the necessary conditions are fulfilled, visa liberalization should be provided for Turkish citizens for entering EU countries as of June 2016. Moreover, there are articles regarding the renewal of the customs union agreement between Turkey and the EU and the continuation of the negotiations remaining in the membership process. Although five years have passed since the deal was signed between the two parties, which was generally prepared within this framework, still not functioning effectively.

One of the biggest problems among the reasons for this is that the ongoing disagreements between the two parties on certain issues block the process. If we look at the activities of both sides within the framework of the deal, the Turkish side has succeeded in stopping the irregular migration flow to a large extent by increasing the controls at its borders as per the deal. Thus, the number of migrants reaching Greece via Turkey in January 2016, before the deal, decreased from 1,700 people daily to 45 people in January 2017, and remained at low levels in subsequent years. Thus, the number of people arriving in Europe via the Turkey-Greece route in 2015 decreased from 856,723 to 9,714 in 2020. Due to the continuation of the civil war, the ongoing influx of migration

shifted to the routes of Libya-Italy and through Gibraltar to Spain, which are more dangerous. Despite Turkey's readiness for the preparation of 72 articles that are required to be fulfilled by the EU on visa liberalization, by making additional demands, the EU has dragged the progress to a dead end, and so far the issue of visa liberalization has not yet been resolved. Regarding the financial aid envisaged to be provided by the EU, certain disagreements continue between Turkey and the EU in terms of time, amount and operating style. According to the notifications of the Turkish side, of the total 6 billion Euros planned to be sent by the end of 2018, approximately 3.6 billion Euros has been sent so far. However, when we look at the statements made by the EU side, it is stated that 6 billion Euros has been allocated, where 4.1 billion Euros has been transferred and 2 billion Euros are allocated on paper to be spent within the scope of the projects. On this point, we can say that the disagreement between the two parties over the amount stems from the way the EU manages the process. The Turkish side reports that since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, it has provided approximately 40 billion dollars of humanitarian aid for Syrians who have taken refuge in Turkey. All these aids are provided by various organizations in the country, especially by the Turkish Red Crescent. The EU side carries out the funding for the projects, mostly through EU-affiliated institutions operating in the country, instead of transferring the financial resources allocated for Syrians in Turkey to the Turkish government and institutions.

This management style gives the impression that the Turkish government, local institutions and organizations operating in the field of humanitarian aid are not trusted. On the other hand, the project-based execution of fund transfers slows the process down considerably. In addition, the level of participation of domestic organizations remains at a low level, since project coordinators generally prefer organizations close to the EU or operating in member countries by citing various criteria. These two main reasons help us to understand both the time delay and the dispute over quantity. While the figure stated by the Turkish side refers to the money transferred to the projects in the country, the amount stated by the EU indicates the amount planned to be transferred to the projects on paper. In short, the EU's approach to the issue with a development fund style rather than a humanitarian aid and selective behavior of the project managers make it difficult to carry out the process quickly and efficiently. In the readmission process, a total of 3,892 people were sent from Greece to Turkey between 2016 and 2019. Another noteworthy issue is that Turkey readmitted only 86 people in 2019 and suspended this process in 2020 after slowing it down further. In line with all these developments, Turkey stating that the EU is not fulfilling its obligations according to the agreement, therefore deciding to suspend the process of accepting Syrian irregular migrants from Greece, which created a discourse that Turkey did not comply with the agreement. This situation complicated the nature of cooperation by causing an increase in disagreements over the remaining elements of the

agreement, which already operates in a fragile structure that has reached the present day.

In order to improve the relations between Turkey and the EU in general, it is of great importance that the two sides fulfill the promises they made to each other within the framework of the Refugee Agreement. At this point, Turkey states that the Human Rights Action Plan, which covers 9 objectives and 50 targets, has been prepared to meet the remaining criteria regarding visa liberalization, at the same time, demands that the customs union agreement and EU membership negotiations be accelerated and other agreement conditions be fulfilled by the EU.

On the EU side, it is known that intra-union negotiations on the renewal of the Refugee Deal are continuing. After the meeting of the EU countries on the subject in December 2020, it was decided to allocate 485 million Euros to Turkey until the end of 2021. According to the migration section of the report of EU High Representative for Foreign Relations and Security Policy Josep Borrell which was presented to EU Summit on 25-26 March 2021 we see that he advocates that cooperation should be improved in some selected areas. Among these, Borrell states that he expects authorization from the EU to renew the existing Customs Union agreement between Turkey and the EU in a way that will benefit both sides and in particular for the development of agriculture, services, the digital economy and the procurement system. It is recommended that reviving high-level meetings and dialogues between the two sides in areas such as economy, energy, political developments, foreign and security policies and green economy and strengthening inter-communal relations with the effective use of projects such as Erasmus + and Horizon Europe. Within the framework of the readmission process, it is envisaged that Turkey will readmit 1450 refugees from Greece and that the procedures for Syrians to be taken from Turkey in return will be accelerated. However, in all these statements of Borrell, an important note or a step on the issue of visa liberalization is not seen. The negotiation process of the Refugee Deal, which is planned to be renewed, is planned to be completed in 2022.

In summary, when we look at the expectations of the parties from the Refugee Deal, the Turkish side approaches the event from a perspective based on the fulfillment of the obligations of the EU in the original deal. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the EU refrains from commenting on visa liberalization, while it is looking forward to the renewal of the customs agreement, the efficient execution of the readmission process and the improvement of relations in general. On the other hand, the absence of any mention of a regulation on the use of aid funds and the fact that the funds to be transferred are well below the previous number show that there is no change in the EU's views on visa liberalization and aid funds. In light of all these developments, expressing that how the new negotiation process will progress depends on how much concessions the parties will make on various issues, we will monitor the progress of the process together in the coming period.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev had a meeting with his Kazakh counterpart Mukhtar Tleuberdi. During the meeting, Kazakbaev mentioned that Kyrgyzstan would continue conducting its foreign policy aimed at deepening and strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations with brotherly state Kazakhstan and would further expand cooperation in political, trade, investment and transport sectors. He called for joint actions to deepen bilateral ties (Kabar, 28.05.2021).
- The President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov, who was on a working visit to Ashkhabad. The parties discussed a wide range of bilateral issues, including cooperation in trade, investment and industrial sectors. The Minister Kamilov and his Turkmen counterpart Rashid Meredov signed an Agreement on a Joint Turkmen-Uzbek intergovernmental commission on water management issues and an agreement on a paid land use (Orient, 26.05.2021).
- The President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko visited Russia, where he had a meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The Presidents discussed development of bilateral ties in the future and current development of economic, trade and energy cooperation. They also focused on issues of further integration within the Union State of Russia and Belarus. President Lukashenko informed Vladimir Putin in detail about the circumstances and reasons behind the incident with the Ryanair jetliner (TASS, 29.05.2021).
- The Minister of Defense of Kyrgyzstan Taalaibek Omuraliev held a meeting with the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan Rapol Zhoshybaev. The sides tackled topical issues of bilateral military and military-technical cooperation between the defense ministries of the two countries. Particular attention was paid to the supply of military-technical equipment to Kyrgyzstan within the bilateral agreement on the provision of gratuitous military-technical assistance. The sides confirmed their readiness to further develop cooperation in the field of defense within frameworks of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Commonwealth of Independent States (Kabar, 25.05.2021).
- The Minister of Defense of Ukraine Andriy Taran and the Georgian Defense Minister Juansher Burchuladze signed a plan of bilateral cooperation between the military agencies of the two countries. During the bilateral meeting, the sides exchanged views on a number of topical issues of mutual interest. The Heads of defense ministries touched upon the state of affairs in the Sea of Azov-Black Sea region in view of Russia's regular violations of free and safe navigation. The sides emphasized that both countries had similar goals and agreed to cooperate in the NATO Membership Action Plan (Ukrinform, 26.05.2021).
- Minsk hosted a meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the CIS under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Belarus Roman Golovchenko. The meeting was attended by delegations from all CIS member-states except for Ukraine. The heads of delegations signed a number of documents regulating cooperation between the member-states in various fields. The meeting participants approved a Concept of cooperation between government (executive) bodies responsible for the management of state material reserves in the CIS member states for the period through 2030 and the Plan of main activities to implement it.

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- Vice Minister of Industry and Infrastructure Development of Kazakhstan Amaniyaz Yerzhanov took part in the Third International Energy Saving Forum with the participation of more than 20 countries. He mentioned that Kazakhstan was planning to reduce the energy intensity of GDP by 30% by 2030 and twofold by 2050 from that of 2008. The country invested more than 300 billion tenge (\$699.3 million) in the implementation of action plans for energy saving and energy efficiency. By implementation of these plans, Kazakhstan saved almost 78 billion tenge (\$181.8 million) (Qazaq TV, 28.05.2021).
- Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Sardor Umurzakov and the Head of the Afghan Presidential Administration Mohammad Shakir Kargar discussed economic cooperation issues between the two countries. The officials announced that Uzbekistan and Afghanistan would sign an Agreement on Preferential Trade by the end of 2021. The agreement will increase bilateral trade from \$800 million in 2020 to \$2 billion in the coming years. The parties noted a great potential of the free trade zone "Termez International Trade Center" (UzReport, 26.05.2021).
- Uzbekistan plans to construct a new 413 meters bridge over the Amu Darya River. This infrastructural project will reduce the distance for transportation of goods coming from Russia and Kazakhstan by 240 km and delivery time by 6 hours. It is expected that the volume of freight transportation will increase twice and reach 25 million tons a year. The bridge will also reduce the costs of internal trade. The project is being implemented by the Uzbekistan Railways (UzReport, 28.05.2021).
- The trade between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in January-April 2021 reached \$166.9 million. While Turkmenistan exported 130.5 million dollars to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan's import from Uzbekistan was 36.5 million dollars. In 2020, the Uzbek-Turkmen trade amounted to \$527 million. The People's Republic of China (PRC) remains to be the largest trade partner of Uzbekistan. The trade between Uzbekistan and the PRC during the above-mentioned period exceeded \$2.1 billion (Aa.com.tr, 27.05.2021).
- According to Belarus' Deputy Agriculture and Food Minister Aleksei Bogdanov, the country's agricultural exports demonstrate record numbers. In the first quarter of 2021, Belarus' exports amounted to \$1.5 billion and increased by 5.3% compared to the same period last year. Exports to Asia and Oceania increased by 70.1%, to European Union countries by 38.4% and to China by about 88%. Exports to Asian and Oceanic countries increased by 70.1%, to European Union countries by 38.4% and to China by about 88%. Russia's share in Belarus' food export went down to 73.5% (BelTA, 24.05.2021).
- The state-owned railway companies of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan held a meeting in Baku to discuss cargo transportation issues. The parties agreed to digitize the document flow along the route to increase the volume of cargo. During January-April of 2021, the transit container shipments through Azerbaijan's territory increased by 49% compared to the same period last year. Participants noted an importance of adopting a development strategy to use the potential of the International Trans-Caspian transport route (AzerNews, 26.05.2021).

Society and Culture

- Turkistan hosted the International Conference entitled "Turkistan: Spiritual Capital of the Turkic World". The event was co-organized by the Turkic Academy and the Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University Zhanar Temirbekova and officials from the Ministries and local administration. The conference focused on further strengthening of deep-rooted relations between the Turkic States in light of the new status of the city of Turkistan (Turkkon.org, 28.05.2021).
- The Turkish Airlines launched its first flight from Turkistan to Istanbul dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence. The flights will be operated on a regular basis once a week on Boeing 737. A round-trip fare starts from 119,500 tenge (US\$278). The frequency of flights are expected to increase as the epidemiological situation improves. Before that in March, 2021 a Kazakh low-cost carrier Fly Arystan had launched regular flights connecting Turkistan and Istanbul (Astanatimes, 28.05.2021).
- A Turkish media group Albayrak Media Group and Azerbaijan's Trend News Agency have established a joint platform called "Turkic World". The opening event of the new digital project was attended by Turkey's Ambassador to Azerbaijan Cahit Bagci, Azerbaijan Media Development Agency Executive Director Ahmad Ismayilov, the Head of Albayrak Media Digital Omer Karaca, Azerbaijani parliamentarians and media executives. The project is expected to boost media ties between the two countries (Dailysabah, 25.05.2021).
- Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) provided support for the "Lafet Gagauz" education program for Gagauz pre-school children. The program has been organized by the Meras Association in order to raise awareness on the usage of the Gagauz language in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Moldova. Certificates of achievement and bicycles were handed out to those who successfully completed the program (Tika.gov.tr, 29.05.2021).
- The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Turkey to Mongolia Zafer Ates had a courtesy call on the Chairman of the State Great Hural (Parliament) of Mongolia Gombojavyn Zandanshatar. The deepening of bilateral friendly relations and cooperation in the fields of history, culture, tourism and education was the main subject of discussion during the meeting. The sides discussed and shared their views on the possible projects and programs to be jointly implemented to promote valuable heritage, history, culture and traditions to promote tourism between the two countries (Akipress, 26.05.2021).
- The World Bank continues to provide financial assistance to Tajikistan to fight the consequences of the pandemic. The Minister of Finance of Tajikistan Faiziddin Qahhorzoda and the World Bank Country Manager for Tajikistan Jan-Peter Olters have signed a \$21.3 million grant aid agreement. Using these funds, Tajikistan will purchase coronavirus vaccines, personal protection equipment and tests, and will support the immunization system and training of vaccination personnel. Moreover, the country will buy vaccines against other seasonal infectious diseases (Asia-Plus, 24.05.2021).