



NEW EU LEADERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS

One of the largest forced migration crises in this century has entered its ninth year without seeing a light at the end of the tunnel for peace and stability in Syria. Since 2011, 13 million people have been forced to migrate, including around 6.6 million people who relocated to the country's safer regions. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by September 12, 2019, there are 5,640,126 registered refugees who reside outside Syria. Turkey with 3,663,863 people, or 65%, hosts the largest group followed by Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq with 924,161, 657,445, and 228,573 refugees, respectively. In addition to that, around 1.1 million Syrians reached the European soil through illegal ways.

This migration flow has various effects over many fields such as economy, politics, society and others in a wide region that covers the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and Turkey. There is no doubt that the migration crisis has also affected international and domestic policies of the countries involved. In general, it could be said that Turkey with its open-door policy demonstrates a positive attitude towards Syrian refugees and has so far spent around \$40 billion for humanitarian assistance purposes.

Meanwhile, in the case of the European Union, both positive and negative attitudes could be observed among its member countries. Within the non-frontier EU countries, Germany and Finland pursue more friendly migration policies, whereas Poland and Hungary approach migration topics negatively and even refuse to cooperate with other member states in certain European Commission's programs on relocation and resettlement issues. This is mainly due to domestic political situations in these two countries and the orientation of their ruling political parties. Overall, the left-wing parties in the EU approach the migration issue in a more constructive way by supporting potentially useful plans and actions, while the right-wing and especially far-right parties use anti-migrant rhetoric as the main tool of their propaganda to raise support for their campaigns.

Due to the changes in the political atmosphere in the European countries in the past couple of years with the rising public support for the far-right parties and groups, many researchers have started to pay more attention to the reasons of this

phenomenon. Thus, several studies indicate that there is a correlation between the rise of the immigration flow and an increase in votes received by the far-right parties, usually at the expense of the left-wing ones.

General results of the 2019 European Parliament election show that there are several changes in the distribution of 751 members of the European Parliament (MEPs). As expected, the European People's Party (EPP) group has taken the lead with 182 MEPs (24.23%) followed by the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group with 154 MEPs (20.51%), the Renew Europe group formerly known as the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group with 108 MEPs (14.38%), the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) group with 74 MEPs (9.85%) and others. Comparing with the 2014 election, the right-wing populist parties such as the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group have lost a significant number of votes, with the former losing 15 seats and the latter failing to register as a group. Meanwhile, the Greens/EFA gained 22 seats reaching 74, and the Renew Europe increased its seats from 69 to 108. On the other hand, both EPP and S&D came short in 2019, losing 34 and 31 seats in the European Parliament, respectively.

Looking at the election results in detail at the country level, various interesting results can be observed. For instance, the S&D faced a major loss in votes in such countries as Germany, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden. Meanwhile, the Greens/EFA surprised everyone with an unexpected support from EU citizens from across the European Union, significantly raising their electoral support in Finland, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, UK, France and Portugal. As for the far-right parties, the general trend is that their triumphant period usually ends within 4-5 years, as confirmed at the 2019 European Parliament election, since, compared with the 2014 election, they lost the support of their voters in many countries, including Denmark, Spain, France, and Belgium.

It is quite interesting to see the rise of the Greens/EFA group not only in such countries as Finland where the far-right parties are weak but also in countries like Austria. In this country, the Greens increased their support by almost three times reach-

ing 14%, while former Chancellor Sebastian Kurtz's populist center-right Austrian People's Party also increased its support from 8% to 34.9% compared with the previous 2014 European Parliament election. Moreover, in France, another stronghold of right-wing parties, the Greens increased their support to 13.4% of votes, while Marine Le Penn's National Rally far-right party fell to 23.31%. The surprising outcome also occurred in Denmark where the far-right Danish People's Party lost almost half of its voting support and three out of four of its seats, gained by the Renew Europe and Greens/EFA groups.

The general snapshot of the 2019 European Parliament election indicates that the far-right parties lost support, which they received during the 2014 election campaign riding the wave of such events as the massive migration flow and economic difficulties in certain EU countries. The fact that the Greens have gained more support could be considered as good news in the context of the EU migration policies since their position on migration is more positive than that of the far-right parties.

In addition to that, there will be a change in two key EU positions on November 1, 2019, with Ursula von der Leyen replacing Jean-Claude Juncker as the President of the European Commission and Josep Borrell becoming the next EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. As part of her campaign promises, Ursula von der Leyen put a special emphasis on climate neutrality, the migration pact and balanced representation between Eastern and Western Europe that provided her with additional support from the S&D and Greens/EFA groups.

These changes, when considered in the context of migration, are good news since pro-migration high-ranking EU officials could have a positive impact on the EU's current and future efforts related to the resolution of certain troubling migration issues. On this point, Ursula von der Leyen's recent visit to Italy regarding the migration issues could be considered as a signal that the topic of migration would be one of the top priorities of the European Commission under her presidency.

To sum up, the changes in the European Parliament and the EU's executive bodies that brought the cadres with more positive and enthusiastic views on the issues of migration and refugees promise a transformation that would improve the EU's extremely bureaucratic procedures towards refugees.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- During his visit to Moscow to attend the city's 872nd anniversary and launch Kazakhstan's cultural days in Russia, First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The two leaders attended the opening ceremony of the renovated Kazakh pavilion at the VDNH exposition (Astana Times, 10.09.2019).
- The UN General Assembly held an official, high-level plenary meeting to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Day against Nuclear Tests, with the participation of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Emphasizing Kazakhstan's leadership in global nuclear disarmament, Guterres recalled that the International Day was officially set for August 29, marking the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site (MFA of Kazakhstan, 10.09.2019).
- The fourth round of political consultations between the ministries of foreign affairs of Uzbekistan and Malaysia was held in Tashkent. During the talks, the parties discussed prospects for further development of cooperation in political, trade-economic, investment, tourism, cultural-humanitarian and other fields, and emphasized the importance of enhancing inter-parliamentary relations (UzDaily, 13.09.2019).
- The transfer of 54 Ukrainian citizens from penitentiary institutions in the temporarily occupied areas of the Luhansk region to the government-controlled territory of Ukraine took place near the town of Shchastia. Since December 2018, as a result of seven transfers of prisoners, 373 convicts were transferred from the occupied Donbas (Ukrinform, 12.09.2019).
- Within the framework of the NATO Operational Capabilities Concept program, the NATO multinational team conducted an evaluation of the reconnaissance company and two Mi-17 helicopters of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces at the Garaheybat training center. The objective of the evaluation was to verify the conformity of the units to the NATO standards (Trend, 13.09.2019).
- The opening ceremony of the Center-2019 strategic command post exercise was held at the Lyaur training ground in Tajikistan. During the maneuvers, the military will work out the use of force groupings in combating international terrorism and ensuring security in the Central Asian region. In total, about 128,000 servicemen will take part in the Center-2019 exercise (Sputnik, 15.09.2019).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- During his visit to China, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev held talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. The parties signed the joint statement on long-term, strategic, comprehensive partnership, as well as a number of documents concerning bilateral economic cooperation and major investment projects in a wide range of areas (Akorda, 11.09.2019).
- Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Askar Mamin held a meeting with representatives of the Association of Turkish and Kazakh Businessmen. The parties discussed issues of strengthening bilateral economic cooperation and implementing new joint investment projects in Kazakhstan. It was noted that the trade turnover between the two countries grew by 73.5% during January-July 2019 (Government.kz, 13.09.2019).
- Ashgabat hosted the 83rd meeting of the CIS Economic Council, at which a wide range of issues were discussed concerning economic interaction within the CIS, including free trade in services and digital development. The heads of the delegations approved the draft Declaration on Strategic Economic Cooperation of the CIS member states aimed at creating effective partnership mechanisms (Trend, 13.09.2019).
- The fifth meeting of the intergovernmental Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan commission on economic cooperation was held in Ashgabat, during which the parties reviewed prospects for expanding mutual trade and creating joint ventures in various sectors. The delegations also expressed interest in establishing car-ferry and rail-ferry services between the two countries (MFA of Turkmenistan, 13.09.2019).
- Chairman of the Board of Uzbekistan Temir Yollari Khusnutdin Khasilov held negotiations with the delegation led by Director General of Turkish State Railways Arikon Erol to discuss strengthening ties in the field of railway transport. The parties also discussed the creation of a joint working group to promote bilateral cooperation along the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars transport corridor and the Turkmen-Iranian railway links (UzDaily, 11.09.2019).
- Over 30 entrepreneurs attended a business forum organized by the Foreign Trade Chamber of the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan in Tashkent. The main purpose of the event was to establish contacts with Kazakh businessmen living in Uzbekistan and introduce them with interesting startups, business initiatives and existing projects (MFA of Kazakhstan, 13.09.2019).

Society and Culture

- The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia is set to implement a large-scale countrywide project providing for the construction or complete restoration of nearly 150 schools in Georgia. 63 new schools are to be built throughout the country, while 88 educational establishments will undergo complete rehabilitation in 2019-2020 (Georgia Today, 12.09.2019).
- President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed a decree establishing a visa-free entry regime for citizens of China, including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. According to the decree that will come into force on January 1, 2020, Chinese citizens will be entitled to a visa-free entry to Uzbekistan via the country's international airports for a period of no more than seven days (UzA, 13.09.2019).
- The National Museum of Kazakhstan opened its exhibition named «The Great Steppe: History and Culture» in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. The exhibition presents 207 items from the collections of the National Museum, including the famous symbol of Kazakhstan – the Golden Warrior (Government.kz, 16.09.2019).
- 170,500 tourists from Turkmenistan visited Turkey in January-July 2019, which is 20.27% more compared to the same period of 2018. Among 24.6 million tourists who visited Turkey in the first seven months of 2019, the share of Turkmen citizens amounted to 0.69%. During the reporting period, the total number of foreign tourists in Turkey rose by 14.11% (Trend, 11.09.2019).
- Within the framework of the traditional annual Anatolian Festival of Culture and Art, the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in Turkey in cooperation with the municipality of the Etimesgut district of Ankara held the event called the Evening of Kyrgyzstan. Local officials, diplomatic corps, Kyrgyz students, and ethnic Kyrgyz living in Turkey attended the event showcasing Kyrgyz folk arts and crafts (Trend, 09.09.2019).
- 16 full-length films and 12 short movies were screened at the fourth MOLDOX International Festival of Documentary Film for social change titled Metamorphoses held in Moldova. According to the organizers, the mission of the festival is twofold – to enlighten Moldovan people through a free of charge access to films and to train young filmmakers interested in creating documentaries with social impact (Moldpres, 12.09.2019).