



NEW MIGRATION FLOW TRENDS TO EUROPE

The civil war in Syria has caused one of the greatest migration flows since World War II and forced more than 13 million people to leave their homes. Among them, around 6.6 million have relocated within the country, while over 5.6 million have sought refuge in neighboring countries, with 3.6 million of them currently residing in Turkey. The scope of the migration flow has spread beyond the region to North Africa, Turkey and finally to the European continent. It is believed that approximately 1.6 million refugees have illegally reached Europe since the start of the conflict, and the major migration flows occurred in 2015 and 2016 when the conflict in Syria escalated. Most of the migrants used the Turkey-Greece and Libya-Italy routes as the main arterial passages, while some also aimed to reach Europe through entering Bulgaria and Spain.

Due to its close proximity to Syria and safer conditions of entering the country through Turkey, Greece has become the main entry point to Europe. In 2015, 856,723 people reached Europe through the Turkey-Greece route, which counted for 85% of total arrivals. With the initiation of the Turkey-EU Refugee Agreement on April 19, 2016, the Turkish coastal forces strengthened their controls over the country's shores and reduced the passages from Turkey to Greece significantly: daily arrivals to Greece dropped from 1,700 people per day in January 2016 to 30 in September 2017. The strict controls along this route have forced migrants who try to reach Europe to use the Libya-Italy route that is more dangerous compared to the Turkey-Greece direction. Starting from 2016, the migration flow has mainly shifted towards the Libya-Italy route and the Central Mediterranean where numbers increased from 153,842 people in 2015 to 181,436 in 2016.

Instead of passing through the stable and secure country like Turkey, they need to go through the country newly recovering from the conflict like Libya where the Tripoli government recognized by the United Nations has a limited control over the country's territory. In addition to that, compared to the Eastern Mediterranean route, the death rates in the Central Mediterranean route have been much higher due to a longer distance and the use of inflatable boats by smugglers in order to

avoid being caught by the Libyan and Italian coastal forces. In 2016, the death rate at the Eastern Mediterranean route was 1 in 88 people, whereas the mortality at the Central Mediterranean route was almost twice higher – one death for every 47 arrivals.

Eventually, this new trend in the illegal migration problem forced Italian officials to work more closely with the Libyan authorities. On February 3, 2017, Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni and Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Serraj signed an agreement regarding the reduction of the migration flow with Italy agreeing to send €20 million to Libya in order to support the efforts of the Libyan government to curb the migration influx from Libya to Italy. According to the agreement, alongside with the financial assistance, Italy will train the Libyan coast guard forces and contribute to the construction of refugee camps in Libya.

According to international law, if illegal migrants are caught within the Libyan sea border they could be sent back to Libya. However, if they are captured in international waters, they need to be brought to Italy in order to process their asylum applications. Due to a large number of arrivals, the procedural period has taken quite a long time, and during this period refugees have settled in refugee camps in Italy. It could be said that the efforts by the Italian and Libyan authorities have surely improved the capability of coastal forces to catch more migrants, but they have not solved the issue of the illegal migration flow.

Moreover, the situation in the Libyan case was more complicated than the Turkish case. While the majority of migrants using the Turkey-Greece route were Syrians who were escaping from the civil war in search of safer and better living conditions, the majority of illegal migrants using the Libya-Italy route were mostly labor migrants from North Africa, the Middle East and countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan who were escaping from poverty. Another issue was that transporting migrants became a lucrative business for people smugglers. It is reported that migrants paid at least \$1,000 per person to smugglers, which contributed to the increase in the number of arrivals from Libya to Italy.

This trend continued until July 2017 when the Tripoli government struck a deal with

Ahmed Al Dabbashi, also known as Al Ammu (the Uncle), the top smuggler in the city of Sabratha, which is the hub for people smugglers in Libya. After the deal, the monthly arrivals to Italy fell dramatically from 22,993 in June 2017 to 3,914 in August 2017, and in 2018 the figures stabilized around 1,000, increasing to about 3,000 only in the summer season. However, although the deal has sharply decreased the arrivals to Europe, the migration flow has changed its course to more diversified routes, especially after the Turkey-EU agreement. With the closure of the two main routes, migrants have shifted towards several different routes, and Spain with 54,099 people has become the main entry point, which is 2.5 times more compared with the previous year. During January-October 2018, Spain accounted for 44% of total arrivals to Europe. Moreover, the arrivals to Greece significantly increased from 28,340 people in 2017 to 43,135 people in 2018.

Although with the Turkey-EU Refugee Agreement arrivals from Turkey to Greece have sharply decreased, and with Hungary strictly controlling its borders, the opening of a new route across Albania to Croatia by people smugglers has turned the Balkans into a new transit route to inner Europe. This new trend in the illegal migration process has put more pressure on Greece as an entrance point. According to registered irregular apprehension reports between January-October 2018, the number of migrants detained in the Balkan countries has rapidly increased, with Bosnia Herzegovina taking the lead with 20,879, compared to only 812 in the same period of 2017. The similar increasing trend could be seen in other Balkan countries like Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro with 7,456, 7,257, 6,152, and 4,071 detained migrants, respectively.

The current trends indicate that the migration flow in terms of migrant profiles has become a mixture of Syrians and labor migrants from different countries, mostly North African ones. As for the preferred path, the Libya-Italy route has divided into two parts where some travel all the way to Gibraltar and pass to Spain, while others use new transit corridors in the Balkans aiming to reach Albania through Greece in order to travel to inner parts of Europe.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The U.S. delegation led by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Alice Wells visited Astana to hold talks under the U.S.-Kazakhstan Enhanced Strategic Partnership Dialogue. The parties discussed the fight against terrorism and other transnational threats, economic and investment cooperation, regional projects, and humanitarian issues.
- Acting Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, whose alliance scored a landslide victory in the snap parliamentary elections, has stated that Armenia is ready to establish direct relations with Turkey without preconditions. The Turkish side has responded that Ankara will normalize relations with Yerevan if it withdraws troops from the occupied Azerbaijani lands and renounces claims about the so-called 1915 “genocide”.
- U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad visited Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as part of his trip across Europe and Asia to facilitate an inclusive Afghan peace process. During his meetings with Uzbek and Turkmen foreign ministers Abdulaziz Kamilov and Rashid Meredov, Khalilzad discussed joint efforts for stabilization in Afghanistan and diversification of mutual cooperation.
- The EU-Kyrgyzstan Cooperation Council held its 16th meeting in Brussels to review the ongoing negotiations on an enhanced partnership and cooperation agreement and the EU’s support for Bishkek’s reforms in the areas of the judiciary, education, rural development, and water management. The parties also discussed opportunities to promote private sector development, facilitate trade and increase regional cooperation.
- During his visit to Azerbaijan, Iran’s Border Guard Commander Qasem Rezaee met with President Ilham Aliyev and relevant high-ranking officials. The parties discussed bilateral border security cooperation and prospects for military collaboration and exchanged views on regional security issues, as well as ways to address common threats.
- The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has dismissed as false the report by Foreign Policy claiming that Tbilisi did not accept the nomination of Bridget Brink, the experienced career diplomat, as the new U.S. ambassador to Georgia. According to the report, Brink was rejected because of her favorable attitude toward former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.
- Baku hosted for the second time talks between top NATO and Russian military officials. NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe Curtis Scaparrotti and Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov discussed global and regional security issues, including transparency and predictability of NATO’s and Russia’s military activities in Europe

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Agriculture supported by the Ministry of Economy organized the Azerbaijan-Turkey business forum in Baku, which was attended by government officials and entrepreneurs from the two countries. The parties discussed ways to expand bilateral cooperation in the agricultural sector, including the creation of joint ventures and the facilitation of imports and exports of agricultural and food products.
- The government of Tajikistan abolished customs duties for goods imported from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and other CIS countries that are parties to the October 2011 CIS free trade zone agreement, except for goods withdrawn from the free trade regime. At the same time, goods in question are not exempt from other applicable taxes and fees.
- According to President Mirziyoyev, in 2018, Uzbekistan produced agricultural products worth 58 trillion 181 billion sums (\$7 billion). Uzbek farmers harvested 6.124 million tons of grain, 2.3 million tons of cotton, 8.661 million tons of vegetables, 2.411 million tons of potato, 1.607 million tons of gourds, about 2.1 million tons of fruit, 1.314 million tons of grapes, and 18,000 tons of cocoons, as well as produced 1.789 million tons of meat and 7.83 million tons of milk.
- President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev launched the construction on the Saryarka main gas pipeline that is designed to supply gas to the central and northern parts of Kazakhstan, including Astana. The total cost of the pipeline to be constructed by the KazTransGas national company is expected to equal 370 billion tenge (\$1 billion).
- The 39th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was held in Baku. The delegations of 12 BSEC member states discussed a number of issues related to the further strengthening of their trade and economic relations in the wider Black Sea region.
- Uzbekistan, the major importer of Ukrainian white sugar, has resumed customs clearance of sugar and other goods coming from Ukraine. Earlier, Tashkent suspended processing cargoes of the Ukrainian origin, presumably in retaliation for an anti-subsidy investigation into imports of Uzbek passenger cars launched by Kiev.
- Kazakhstan’s Samruk-Kazyna national welfare fund will put up for sale additional 10% of shares of the Kazatomprom atomic company in 2019. 15% of Kazatomprom’s shares were sold at the Astana International Financial Center and the London Stock Exchange for \$451 million.

Society and Culture

- The U.S. State Department included Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the list of “countries of particular concern” (CPC) for severe religious freedom violations, along with China, Eritrea, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan. Meanwhile, for the first time since 2006, Uzbekistan was removed from the CPC list and added to the Special Watch List.
- Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov declared an amnesty to mark the Day of Neutrality, authorizing the release of 796 people from prison. Such acts of clemency are issued in Turkmenistan several times a year on the occasion of state and religious holidays. In September 2018, Berdimukhammedov pardoned 1,722 inmates on the eve of the Independence Day.
- According to a decree of the Tajik government, until April 1, 2019, all entities in Tajikistan that provide paid services must accept, along with cash, non-cash payments. The country’s Tax Committee and Customs Service are also obliged to receive tax payments, fines, penalties, fees, duties and other payments in a non-cash way through electronic means of payment.
- President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed an edict establishing a national space agency as part of the country’s efforts to develop a competitive indigenous space industry. The agency to be headquartered in Ankara will report to the Ministry of Industry and Technology, but will have financial and administrative autonomy, as well as a special budget.
- Representatives of the EU, Sweden and Austria signed a contract in Tbilisi to start the “Green Economy: Sustainable Mountain Tourism & Organic Agriculture” project that will support Georgian small and medium enterprises working in these fields. The €6.8-million four-year project will focus on Georgia’s areas of Upper Svaneti, Racha-Lechkhumi and Lower Svaneti, and Imereti.
- Kazakhstan’s SCAT airline launched a new flight connecting for the first time Astana with Tajikistan’s capital Dushanbe. The flight will be operated twice a week, on Fridays and Sundays, on the CRJ-200 aircraft. Air Astana also plans to open flights on the same route with a frequency of three flights per week in the spring of 2019.
- During the meeting between Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Aziz Abdulkhakov and Lufthansa Regional Director for the CIS and Russia Ronald Schultz, the parties discussed a possibility of the German airline returning to the Uzbek market. If a deal is reached, Lufthansa intends to redirect its Frankfurt-Baku-Ashgabat flights to the Frankfurt-Baku-Tashkent route.