



UNDECIDED FATE OF ILLEGAL MIGRANTS IN EUROPEAN UNION

As of 2016, there were 65.6 million people across the world who had been forced to leave their homes due to various reasons. Among them, 22.5 million were reported to seek refuge abroad, while 10 million people were registered as stateless persons, and the rest were relocated to a different region in their country. According to the United Nations statistics, every day 42,500 people have to leave their homes. This number has significantly increased during the 2014-2016 period, during which the civil war in Syria has reached its peak forcing millions of people to become refugees. This conflict has put 13.2 million Syrians in need, with 6.6 million migrating to safer regions in the country and 5.6 million searching a refuge abroad. As of 2018, Turkey hosts more than 63% of Syrian refugees, or 3.58 million, followed by Lebanon (986,942 people), Jordan (666,113 people), Iraq (249,641 people) and Egypt (128,956 people). However, many refugees try to reach Europe, mainly its Western part, with countries like Germany, the United Kingdom and France being their desired main destinations.

An attempt on searching a better life in developed countries of Europe officially starts with sending an application of a refugee to the competent authorities of European countries. However, due to the massive amount of applications and bureaucracy, reaching Europe through legal ways could take quite a long time. Therefore, millions of Syrians who are escaping from the civil war and refugees from other "hot spots" try to reach Europe illegally. This has caused a serious challenge for the frontline countries of Europe (South Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain) and for the countries located in the migration corridor to Europe (Turkey-Greece and Libya-Italy routes).

By 2015, over 1.16 million people illegally reached Europe via the main Turkey-Greece and Libya-Italy routes. The massive increase in the number of arrivals has caused a serious concern for many European countries, especially for the frontline and main destination countries. In order to regulate the uncontrolled migration influx to Europe via Turkey, on March, 19, 2016, Turkey and the European Union (EU) reached an agreement. This agreement allowed establishing a legal mechanism for accepting refugees who are in need of international protection and reducing the number of arrivals from the Turkey-Greece route. According to the agreement, Turkey strengthened border controls in the Aegean Sea and reduced the arrivals by 98%. The arrivals dropped from 1,700 people in January 2016 to 45 in January 2017 and 31 in May 2018.

As for the mechanism for accepting refugees, there has been a limited success. According to

the agreed resettlement and relocation scheme also known as the July 20, 2015 scheme, it was planned to resettle 22,504 and relocate 160,000 people by September 2017. Due to various reasons, the parties were not able to reach the targeted numbers until the defined timeline. In fact, as of March 2018, the number of resettled persons totaled 29,314, including 19,432 people under the July 20, 2015 scheme and 8,027 under the EU-Turkey agreement. In case of relocations, by March 2018, only 33,846 people have been relocated, including 21,847 people from Greece and 11,999 from Italy. However, the figure is far below the target amount of 160,000 people.

There are a range of reasons that slowed down the resettlement process to reach the targeted number within the planned timeline. Long bureaucratic regulations mostly related to security background checks has extended the period for the acceptance process. The EU member countries were reluctant to soften their security background checks to fasten the process despite the fact that the EU Commission recommended to apply security background checks only if it seems necessary to reduce the time for this procedure from several months to 2 weeks.

In addition to that, countries like Poland, Austria and Hungary stood strongly against accepting refugees, which greatly slowed the process. Despite the pressure from the EU Commission, Poland and Hungary did not accept any refugee for the resettlement, whereas Austria, though being defined as an anti-migrant country, has complied with its pledged number of 1,900 resettling people under the July 20, 2015 scheme. However, after the October 2017 federal elections, the balance between the country's left and right political forces has been changed in favor of the right-wing parties, which do not plan to continue accepting refugees for the resettlement purposes.

In order to find a solution to the resettlement issue, Bulgaria, which leads the rotating presidency of the EU Council until June 2018, has offered a modified version of the Dublin Regulation aimed at regulating responsibilities in processing applications of refugees seeking international protection. Under the revised document, a six-month time-limit asylum procedure could be extended to 10 years, which caused a major debate among the EU member countries. According to the current Dublin Regulation, refugees need to be registered in the first arrival country and cannot seek asylum in another country before the 6-month time limit. Moreover, it is proposed to increase payments for accepted refugees and change mandatory quotas for their resettlement. According to the Dublin Regulation, the EU countries, which agreed to

accept refugees for permanent settlement, receive a €10,000 for every single person from the EU budget. The new proposal aims to increase this amount to €30,000. Under the new proposal, the mandatory quotas for resettlement and relocation, which ended in September 2017 and turned into a voluntary acceptance process, will be implied if there is another major inflow of migrants.

The Bulgarian proposal aimed to please the frontline countries by increasing the financial support for accepting refugees and reduce the criticism of Poland, Austria and Hungary by increasing the duration of stay in the registered country up to 10 years. However, it has led to a greater division among the member countries. The main criticism of the frontline countries about the proposal states that the document is heavily concentrated on searching the political solidarity but lack on sharing the burden. In other words, the frontline countries indicate that increasing the duration of stay to 10 years will multiply the financial burden of these countries, which has made a counter offer of increasing the term up to the maximum 2-year limit. Moreover, the proposal has been also criticized for not providing any solution to the immediate financial problems related to hosting refugees in these countries. The bloc of Poland, Austria and Hungary expressed their concern with the decision-making point on implementing the mandatory regulation, stating that the words "if there will be a major inflow" could be seen as an invitation to migrants saying that if they come in large numbers the EU countries will definitely accept them.

The main concern of Bulgaria as the rotating president of the EU Council is to speed up the resettlement process since over a million of refugees across Europe are waiting to be resettled. Moreover, the countries in favor of speeding up the process of the resettlement have been pushing this proposal to be accepted since Austria is the next country to hold the rotating presidency in the EU Council. The Austrian right-wing parties have already indicated their intention to block the arrival of migrants to Europe. In conclusion, it was assumed that a new agreement on the Dublin Regulation would be concluded before the EU Summit planned for June 2018, during which Austria will assume the presidency for the next six months. However, under the current political situation it seems that debates on the resettlement process in the EU will be prolonged until the frontline countries and the bloc of Poland, Austria and Hungary could make certain compromises and reach an agreement.

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Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- During the meeting of the heads of governments of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) held in Dushanbe, the prime ministers of the CIS countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the deputy head of Turkmenistan's cabinet of ministers, signed 13 agreements on a broad range of cooperative issues, including energy, technology, management of electronic and electrical equipment waste, interstate standardization, etc.
- During his official visit to Baku, European Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources Gunther Oettinger met with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to discuss bilateral cooperation in the political, economic, humanitarian, cultural and other fields. The parties also exchanged views on issues related to the development of energy ties and trade turnover expansion.
- During his official visit to Ankara, Special Envoy on Syria of the President of Russia Alexander Lavrentiev met with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the situation in Syria focusing on the political settlement of the conflict.
- During his official visit to Moscow, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed met with President of Russia Vladimir Putin to discuss cooperation between the two countries, as well as a variety of regional and international issues of mutual interest. As a result of the visit, the parties signed the declaration of strategic partnership in the political, security, economic and cultural spheres.
- During his official visit to Brussels, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei met with Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of Belgium Didier Reynders to discuss prospects of strengthening bilateral ties in the political, trade, economic, humanitarian and cultural sectors.
- According to Deputy Head of the Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation of Russia Vladimir Drozhzhov, the country signed a new contract with Kazakhstan on the delivery of four Mil Mi-35 transport and attack helicopters. The helicopters are expected to be delivered this year.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- According to the Finance Ministry of Belarus, as of May 1, 2018, the country's external state debt totaled \$16.4 billion, down by \$315.6 million, or 1.9%, since the beginning of the year (taking into account differences in currency exchange rates). It was noted that in January-April 2018 the Belarusian government borrowed \$990.5 million abroad, including \$600 million via Eurobonds and \$313.6 million from the Russian government and banks.
- According to Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Kozak, since June 1, 2018, the country cut excise duties on gasoline and diesel fuel by 3,000 and 2,000 rubles (\$48 and \$32) per ton, respectively. The government considers the possibility of further reducing the excise duties on automobile gasoline and diesel fuel by 700 rubles per ton from July 1, 2018. The lowering of the excise duties on oil products is related to a hike in gasoline prices, which has been observed since the beginning of the year.
- According to the Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK) of Turkey, Azerbaijan supplied 1.72 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas to the country in January-March 2018, as compared to 1.6 bcm in the same period of 2017. It is also noted that in the first four months of 2018 Turkey imported 15.4 bcm of gas, 10.96 bcm of which were imported through pipelines, while LNG imports account for 4.57 bcm. The share of Azerbaijan in the total volume of gas imported to Turkey for the reporting period amounted to 11.2%.
- According to the Statistics Committee of the Kazakh Ministry of National Economy, in May 2018, the inflation rate in Kazakhstan reached 0.2% month-on-month and 2.4% year-to-date. In the past month, the food and non-food prices went up by 0.1% and 0.4%, respectively, while commercial services for the population recorded a 0.2% increase in prices. Since the beginning of the year the prices of food, non-food products, and commercial services have grown by 2.9%, 2.1%, and 2.1%, respectively.
- According to Economy Minister of Azerbaijan Shahin Mustafayev, the country's total investments in Russia exceed \$1 billion. It is noted that Russia's total investments in Azerbaijan's economy reached \$4 billion. In 2017,

the trade turnover between the two countries grew by 22% and reached \$2 billion.

- According to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, in May 2018, the prices of goods and services in the country's consumer market increased by an average 0.8%. In May 2018, the prices of goods increased by an average of 0.4%, while the prices of services grew by 2.1% on average.

Society and Culture

- According to the Foreign Ministry of Serbia, the country's government made a decision on the visa exemption for Azerbaijani nationals, who hold ordinary passports, from June 2, 2018. Under the decision, nationals of Azerbaijan can enter, transit through and stay in the territory of Serbia without a visa for a period not exceeding 90 days in a period of 180 days from the date of entry.
- According to Kazakhstan's private air carrier SCAT, the company made its first flight to the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, which, at the same time, is the company's first flight to a European country. SCAT became the second Kazakh airline, receiving a permission to fly to the European Union destinations, after Air Astana. The company will fly between Astana and Vilnius twice a week. The airline plans to launch 14 new routes, including Astana-Milan, Astana-Vienna and Astana-Prague.
- According to the Culture and Tourism Ministry of Turkey, in April 2018, 7,080 Belarusian tourists visited the country, which is 1,244 people more than in April 2017. Belarusian citizens accounted for 0.27% of the total number of foreigners who visited Turkey in April 2018, compared to 0.28% in April 2017. It was also noted that Turkey's tourism income grew by 31.3% to \$4.425 billion in the first quarter of 2018 as compared to the same period last year.
- According to Deputy Head of the Border Service of the Federal Security Service of Russia Colonel General Igor Shmotkin, in 2017, the passenger traffic at airport border checkpoints grew by almost 34%. It is noted that in 2017 the number of Russians crossing the border in or out of the country was almost 20 million more than that of foreign nationals making in- and outbound trips. The latter crossed the border 64.8 million times last year, while Russian nationals traveled in or out of the country 84.3 million times.