On 18 March 2016, the European Council and Turkey reached an agreement aimed at stopping the flow of irregular migration via Turkey to Europe. According to the EU-Turkey Statement, all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Turkey to the Greek islands and whose applications for asylum have been declared inadmissible should be returned to Turkey.

The agreement followed a series of meetings with Turkey since November 2015 dedicated to deepening Turkey-EU relations as well as to strengthening their cooperation on the migration crisis, with notably the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan activated on 29 November 2015 and the 7 March 2016 EU-Turkey statement. In addition, on 15 December 2015, the Commission proposed a voluntary humanitarian admission scheme for Syrian Refugees in Turkey.

In order to break the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk, the EU and Turkey decided in March 2016 to work together to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. For that purpose, the EU and Turkey agreed that,

1) All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands as of 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey;

2) For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled to the EU;

3) Turkey will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for irregular migration opening from Turkey to the EU;

4) Once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU are ending or have been substantially reduced, a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme will be activated;

5) The fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap will be accelerated with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens at the latest by the end of June 2016. Turkey will take all the necessary steps to fulfil the remaining requirements;

6) The EU will, in close cooperation with Turkey, further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated €3 billion under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Once these resources are about to be used in full, the EU will mobilise additional funding for the Facility up to an additional €3 billion by the end of 2018;
7) The EU and Turkey welcomed the ongoing work on the upgrading of the Customs Union.

8) The accession process will be re-energised, with Chapter 33 opened during the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union and preparatory work on the opening of other chapters to continue at an accelerated pace;

9) The EU and Turkey will work to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria.

Turkey furthermore agreed to accept the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection crossing from Turkey into Greece, and to take back all irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters. Turkey and the EU decided to continue stepping up measures against migrant smugglers and welcomed the establishment of the NATO activity on the Aegean Sea.

Moreover, the European Union has begun disbursing the 3 billion Euro of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey for concrete projects; work has also advanced on visa liberalisation and in the accession talks, including the opening of Chapter 17 last December 2015. In September 2016, the European Commission announced the creation of an ‘Emergency Social Safety Net’ of €348 million starting from October 2016. Up to one million of the most vulnerable refugees will be able to meet their basic needs by receiving monthly cash-transfers via an electronic card.

In its evaluation of the 2015 Report on Turkey, the European Parliament took a special interest in the EU-Turkey cooperation on migrations. It welcomed the statement, but recalled that outsourcing was not a credible long term solution and calls EU Members States for more solidarity in welcoming refugees.

In its evaluation of the 2015 Report on Turkey, the European Parliament took a special interest in the EU-Turkey cooperation on migrations (rapporteur: Kati Piri). It welcomed the statement, but recalled that outsourcing was not a credible long term solution and calls EU Members States for more solidarity in welcoming refugees. It also stressed that:

- the EUR 3 billion funds of ‘Refugee Facility for Refugees in Turkey’ have to be used to relieve refugees and that the Commission has to make sure the funds are properly used and report regularly to the EP on this matter.
- special attention was to be paid to vulnerable groups such as women and children, particularly orphans, and religious minorities such as Christians and Yazidis; emphasises the urgent need to address gender-related violence and abuse against women and girls on the migrant routes crossing Turkey;
- the European Commission was to make sure that rule of non-refoulement was duly respected.

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Visit the European Parliament homepage on Migration.
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