

A dirty deal in Brussels: EU to stop refugees with Erdogan's support

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Hardly any event has exposed the reactionary political character of the European Union (EU) and its elites in recent weeks more than the welcome extended to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Brussels on Monday. After being greeted with full military honours by Belgium's King Philippe, the EU rolled out the red carpet for the Turkish autocrat to persuade him to seal off the EU's external borders and stop the flow of refugees from Syria through the so-called Balkan route.

Even prior to high-ranking EU officials, including social democrat EU Parliament President Martin Schulz, liberal Council President Donald Tusk, and conservative commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, showering Erdogan with praise in joint talks, parts of the dirty deal agreed between the EU and Turkey were already revealed in the media.

On Sunday in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* (FAS), an article entitled "Europe plans to seal off the Aegean Sea" reported on an action plan worked out between the European Commission and Ankara. According to the plan, the Turkish government committed to shut down the border between Turkey and Greece in close collaboration with Greek authorities and the European border protection agency Frontex. According to the FAS, boats commanded by Frontex would patrol the eastern Aegean Sea, bringing all refugees back to Turkey.

With EU financial support, Turkey is to build six new refugee camps for some 2 million people. In exchange, EU states committed to resettle half a million refugees from Turkey in Europe. In addition, there were considerations about declaring Turkey to be a so-called safe country of origin. This would mean that refugees who managed to escape Turkey into the EU in spite of the stringent measures could be immediately deported

to a country where a virtual civil war is raging in the east and human rights are trampled underfoot.

According to the paper the plan had been worked on over recent weeks, involving close collaboration between Commission President Juncker and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union). The final plan is to be ready in time for the next EU summit in mid-October before being implemented as rapidly as possible, the paper reported.

To make clear what is proposed: the EU intends to integrate Turkey into its brutal fortress Europe policy and is offering Erdogan billions in financial aid and close political support ahead of parliamentary elections due on 1 November. Erdogan's goal of weakening the pro-Kurdish HDP with his fierce military intervention in the east and forcing the HDP out of parliament has to date proved unsuccessful, and he is in dire need of some concessions from the EU.

In addition to support towards sealing Europe's borders, Tusk utilised the joint press conference with Erdogan to hold out the prospect of eased visa regulations for Turkish citizens. Turkey was an important partner and it was "indisputable" that Europe must ensure "better control" of its borders in cooperation with Ankara.

The change of course is so apparent that the right-wing German newspaper *Bild* wondered aloud, "Is Erdogan our friend once again?" Over recent months, EU and above all German politicians had criticised Erdogan the "autocrat" (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*) and "modern Khalif" (*Die Welt*) for his domestic and foreign policy.

When the Erdogan regime brutally suppressed the Gezi Park protests two years ago, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union fraction in the European parliament, Herbert Reul,

declared, “The European Commission cannot just proceed to day-to-day business in places where blood has been spilled. The opening of further chapters in negotiations would be regarded by the Erdogan government as a reward for the brutal suppression of peaceful protests by citizens in Taksim Square.”

Criticism grew still further when in late July, Erdogan joined the western coalition against Islamic State, above all to carry out air attacks on Kurdish forces. “Turkish politics seems to have gone astray once again,” Niels Annen, foreign policy spokesman for the SPD, stated at the time. It was to be welcomed that after years of looking the other way, the Turkish government was finally taking on IS in Syria and Iraq and allowing the US to use military bases. But the bombardment of PKK positions at the same time showed “that Erdogan’s priorities obviously continue not to be combating IS,” but rather “as a result [...] the danger concealed within it of expanding the war.”

Erdogan made clear in Brussels that he expected more from the EU than a few symbolic gestures. The European powers would have to abandon all criticism of his regime, and above all support his foreign policy plans. Ankara has been pushing for some time for a no-fly zone in Syria. This is partially aimed at combating Islamic State, but primarily to prevent the emergence of a contiguous Kurdish area in northern Syria, and the Syrian regime led by Bashar al-Assad from winning back lost territory with the support of Russia and Iran.

Erdogan then declared at the joint press conference with Tusk that in addition to the establishment of a no-fly-zone, the overcoming of the refugee crisis required the introduction of a “security zone for protection against terrorism.” He made clear that he took the fight against terrorism to mean the struggle against IS, as well as the suppression of the Kurds and the overthrow of the Assad regime. He accused the Syrian President of “state terrorism,” and declared, “the Islamic State (is) as much of a terrorist organisation as the PKK or PYD.” It was impossible to “speak of good and bad terrorists.” They all had blood on their hands and had to be fought.

Erdogan stated, “Turkey is firm on this issue and we believe that our friends in the EU will show the necessary sensitivity on this point.”

Driven by their determination to resolve the refugee crisis with brutal police methods and military means,

the European powers are relying more closely on Ankara, in spite of internal divisions and close ties to Kurdish forces in the region. “We need Turkey. We cannot do it alone,” stated Tusk prior to the meeting with Erdogan. According to him, the EU was now ready to talk about a “buffer zone” in Syria along the Turkish border.

Just how far the European elites are prepared to go was made clear by a comment in the FAZ authored by Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger and headlined “Talks without taboos.” The prominent journalist, who has close ties to NATO circles and the German government, demanded that it was “of course” necessary to pay the price called for by Ankara to achieve the desired goals. These included “abandoning the need for visas for travel,” a “restraint in criticising Turkey’s policy towards the Kurds and the country’s internal development,” and “agreement on how to proceed in the Syrian conflict.”



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