

Amid Syrian war, Turkey opens borders for Syrian refugees to travel to Europe

Baris Demir
4 March 2020

Last Thursday's strike on a Turkish position that claimed the lives of some three dozen soldiers in Syria's northern Idlib province has already led to a new refugee crisis on Turkey's western border.

Just after the attack, in an attempt to blackmail the European NATO powers into backing Ankara's war aims in Syria, Turkish officials indicated that Ankara would no longer block some 3.5 million refugees from leaving the country for Europe. Before the attack, Ankara also repeatedly claimed that over two million immigrants had departed from Idlib.

On Friday, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said that developments in Idlib, which have displaced hundreds of thousands, had increased the pressure on Turkey, adding that "some asylum seekers and immigrants in our country, who are concerned about the developments, started to move towards our western borders." He added, "If the situation worsens, this risk will continue to rise."

In the next few days, state media broadcast videos of refugees taking to boats on the Aegean Sea and marching to the borders with Greece and Bulgaria. Greek police fired "deterrent" tear gas at hundreds of refugees who entered the demarcation zone between Greece and Turkey, while Bulgaria announced that it would send 1,000 troops to the border.

Turkey's Interior Minister Süleyman Soyulu claimed on Twitter that 76,358 migrants had passed through the border city of Edirne by Sunday morning, on their way to the border crossing with Greece.

According to *Kathimerini*, Greece's foreign ministry says Turkey is engaged in a disinformation campaign on the number of migrants who have entered Greek territory from Turkey. The ministry claimed that "no one can cross the Greek borders. All those attempting illegal entry, are effectively prevented from entering.

Numbers cited by Turkish authorities are entirely false and misleading." The paper also added, "the Foreign Affairs Ministry said that 10,000 migrants had been prevented from entering Greece and that 73 who managed to enter from early Saturday to early Sunday had been arrested. None of them are from the Syrian city of Idlib."

To justify its presence in Idlib, Turkey claims it is creating a safe zone, protecting Syrians from the Assad regime and stopping the flow of asylum seekers. In fact, Ankara is lashing out, seeking a military solution to intractable ethnic and class conflicts inflamed by decades of imperialist war. It aims to seize northern Syria, forcibly populate it with millions of Syrian Arab refugees living in Turkey and thus prevent the consolidation of a Kurdish state along the Turkish-Syrian border.

Syrian refugees, forced to flee to countries around the Middle East to save their lives from the NATO-led proxy war in their country, face increasing chauvinist attacks in addition to rising social misery. In Turkey, the entire capitalist political establishment denounces them, while in Greece they are targeted by far-right groups. Nearly 3.5 million Syrian refugees, forced to flee the war to Turkey, now live in crowded apartments rented at exorbitant rates, sleep in parks, and work for Turkish capitalists at extremely low wages if they are to escape utter destitution.

Conditions in Greece are no less brutal. Tens of thousands of refugees are interned across Greece. They languish in deplorable conditions on the islands of Chios, Samos, Lesbos, Kos and Leros and are squeezed into detention centers, which are de facto concentration camps, designed to only hold a fraction of their current populations. The Moria camp on Lesbos was described by the BBC as "the worst refugee camp in the world."

The persecution of asylum seekers in Turkey and Greece—which fight with each other about the flow of immigrants—is the product of the EU’s brutal policies. Both countries are EU outposts against refugees.

A rotten deal between the EU, Turkey and Greece in March 2016 established Greece as the EU’s jailer of refugees and obliged the Erdogan regime to ensure that refugees from the war zones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan will not make their way to Europe.

The agreement mandates all refugees entering Greece via “irregular” routes—that is, those making the dangerous journey via boat from Turkey to Greece—will be deported back to Turkey. Only those who can prove that they would be persecuted in Turkey can obtain asylum in Greece. Once in Greece, they are interned until their applications for asylum are processed; a majority are denied and sent back to Turkey.

Refugees deported to Turkey have little hope of ever reaching Europe again. The agreement contains a provision placing asylum applications from people who have previously entered Europe “illegally” at the bottom of the asylum list.

Every European government, with Germany and France in the lead, has collaborated in erecting a “Fortress Europe” with barbed wire and machine guns defending the EU’s borders and a ruthless campaign to end the rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

Last month, the foreign ministers of all 27 EU countries agreed to launch a new military mission in Libya in order to enforce the arms embargo agreed in Berlin in January. But if the warships are in a position to rescue refugees, the mission can be stopped immediately. “If pull factors (i.e., factors encouraging migrants to take to the sea in the hope of being rescued and taken to Europe) regarding migration are identified, the maritime elements will be withdrawn,” according to the agreement.

The Syrian war refugees trapped between Turkey and Greece are only a fraction of the over 70 million global population of refugees fleeing wars across the Middle East and Africa, as well as poverty and hunger afflicting growing masses of people worldwide. A network of concentration camps for refugees from imperialist wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and beyond now spans the Near East, the Mediterranean, and much of North Africa. Largely funded by the European Union, these camps hold millions in horrific

conditions, subject to abuse, rape, slavery and even murder.

The fate of Syrian refugees in Turkey underscores how the struggle to defend immigrants is inseparable from the struggle to oppose imperialist war.

The plight of these refugees, expelled from their homes by the bloody operations of imperialism, exposes the vindictive policies of Washington, the EU powers and Ankara. Refugees are held up as targets of chauvinist hatred by bourgeois politicians, whose hands are dripping in blood. Syrian refugees are class brothers and sisters of workers in Turkey and in the European countries where they aim to find refuge, and they must have the right to settle in the country of their choice and study, live, and work as they please.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact