

FINAL REPORT

International Mayors' Conference in Athens

NOW



**NOW Athens, Greece
21-23 July 2016**

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About the Conference

After the very successful N-O-W Conference in Vienna Act.Now organized the next N-O-W Conference in Athens focussing on the EU-Turkey-Agreement and the effects and consequences of its implementation for the communities and on discussing recommendations and conclusions for future approaches and agreements concerning the refugee movement.

The idea behind the conference was to bring together those who deal with the refugees in their communities to share experiences of and ideas about their work. Questions being: Does the EU-Turkey agreement work? What are the advantages and what are the disadvantages and how could it be improved? What measures could be taken to make it work better? What other ideas should be promoted and finally implemented to improve the situation of the refugees and the local populations and stabilize the social and the political climate and equilibrium?

The participants looked at the repercussions of the EU-Turkey-Deal with mayors from Greece, Italy and Turkey (from where most unfortunately only one Mayor did not have to cancel his participation at the very last minute due to travel restrictions imposed after the military coup in Turkey) together with NGO-representatives and Members of the European Parliament, like Ms Katalin Piri, Rapporteur from Turkey to the EU and Gerald Knaus, Head of ESI, European Stability Initiative, the think tank that has originally worked out the proposal the EU-Turkey Agreement is based on.

They analysed the agreement and the current situation, suggesting options of action, amendments, improvements and alternatives. The aim being to develop measures to transfer refugees directly to communities willing to accept them; to communicate, lobby and directly inform concerned/involved politicians on EU and state levels; to publicize the findings in the respective countries and as widely as possible in the framework of the EU in close cooperation with participants, think tanks, opinion leaders and media.

Host & Curator

Hannes Swoboda, Member of European Parliament (ret.), President of The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies – wiiw

Conference Design

- In analogy to the first N-O-W Conference in January 2016 in Vienna, all attendees invited were actively taking part in panels and working sessions, including media representatives except for those only joining the press conference, and the conference was not open to the general public
- Participating stakeholders: Mayors, NGO-Representatives, Members of the European Parliament, Experts, individuals concerned (locals and refugees)
- Everyone attending was equal and his/her voices are equally important
- Working language was English, translated to and from Greek, Turkish, Italian

Opening Message and Greeting from the Austrian Prime Minister for the N-O-W Conference Athens

At the first N-O-W Conference in Vienna in January 2016, I had the pleasure to welcome you as host in the OEGB Austrian Railway assembly hangar in Spittelau, Vienna. I was very impressed by the spirit of empathy and cooperation connecting the many mayors, local and regional politicians from Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Greece, Austria, Germany and other countries during these two days.



Mayors are experts who often act pragmatically while others only talk. Mayors make our societies progress, where others only stoke fears.

I hope - no, more than that: I am confident that the N-O-W conference in Athens will be characterized by a similar spirit to the one of the Vienna encounter, one of large heartedness, rationality and deep humanitarianism.

– Christian Kern, Prime Minister of the Republic of Austria

Abstract: Key Findings & Policy Recommendations:

1. Significant resettlement programmes, bringing refugees to Europe in relevant numbers, must start up.
2. However, not only the political will is lacking here – so do the capabilities and capacities. The European Union is neither logistically nor otherwise prepared for resettlement.
3. A group of top European decision-making politicians would be required to exert pressure to get things moving. Ultimately it is not something that one can either do or not do - it is a significant element of the agreement with Turkey.
4. It would also be a necessary signal that the EU is moving things forwards - that practical solutions can be found.
5. This would be an opportunity for politicians to distinguish themselves positively regarding foreign policy as well.
6. Greece should organise the refugee aid so that it can have a positive economic impact - it should also receive much more financial and practical aid from the EU.
7. The financial crisis and the agreements of the Greek government with its creditors prevent investments which could be beneficial to the refugees as well as to the local communities.
8. The main burden in the establishment of registration hotspots is right now being borne by the Greek islands.
9. With this the EU has created a highly bureaucratic process that does not work - in particular from an administrative perspective. Neither rapid asylum procedures nor distribution throughout Europe are working. The result is islands full of people who are literally “stranded”.
10. Greece needs support for its public administration and its integration measures.
11. The attempts of the Greek authorities to create “perfect refugee camps” are questionable, although certainly interesting - this should be carefully observed.
12. The “One-for-One” rule - according to which one Syrian refugee relocated from Greece to Turkey is replaced by one refugee being granted permission to legally enter the EU - should be dropped. It was the daftest part of the agreement and never had any practical relevance anyway.

“There is no Plan B. And there isn’t even a workable Plan A.”

Robert Misik, journalist, author

It was as if reality and world politics leapt into the room together in real-time, as mayors, experts, Government and NGO representatives, organisers and volunteers made their way to Athens in mid-July. Coup and counter-coup and the dramatically tense situation in Turkey severely disrupted the agenda of the second NOW conference. The original plan was for mayors and experts from all across Europe - and above all from Greece and Turkey - to discuss the refugee situation according to the so-called “EU-Turkey deal”, as well as the concrete impacts of this agreement. But then the gathering faced the question: Is this agreement even relevant any more? At the same time the conference was marked by notable absences: The mayors and many experts from Turkey were forced to cancel last minute because the journey was de facto impossible, because of travel restrictions and as they would not simply abandon their communities at such a critical moment. Only the mayor of Dikili was able to make it.

The NOW conference in Athens considered itself a more locally or regionally focused continuation of the major conference held in Vienna in January. “Project NOW” is - succinctly put - borne by the conviction that it is essential to bring together the widely diverse parties affected by the refugee route in a direct conversation; i.e. individuals from the states neighbouring the war zones, people from the “transit countries” and people from the destination countries. The refugees themselves, individual volunteers, major international NGOs, experts and above all the mayors from the regions involved.

Because it is the people on the ground who are really doing the work, and they are also those who are frequently confronted by new and often surprising challenges and who must practically overcome these. Even worse: It is the upper echelons of politics, at national and overall European level, that actually hinder them in their work. And above all: It is these representatives and dedicated people on the ground who - despite every difficulty - get so many things moving, bring about developments that actually work; i.e. best practice examples from which everyone can learn. Exchanging these productive experiences, across borders and political cultures - that is the aim of the NOW projects.

Understanding the consequences of the EU-Turkey agreement

A topic of the Athens conference was the concrete impact of the refugee agreement with Turkey and the closure of the Balkan route, effective since March 2016. These two incidents, which are connected with each other and have a mutual effect on each other - but that also contradict each other, have concrete effects: In Turkey, on the Greek islands, for the refugees. What is the current situation? Is the refugee agreement rather good or rather bad? Who is paying the price? Can anything be improved? Are there alternatives? These and many other questions were debated at the conference.

Apostoles Veizis from “Médecins sans Frontières” stated that the problems with the agreement start with the name itself: Discussions frequently refer to an EU-Turkey “deal”. “It starts with the very word”, said Veizis. “Deals are what one makes in the world of finance, you don’t make deals about

people. When we are talking about people as if they are the objects of a business contract, then that's something I find unacceptable. It is not a deal, it is an agreement about people."

Alev Korun, member of the Austrian Parliament (Green Party), pointed out a further problematic aspect of the agreement: "The situation whereby a Syrian refugee can only be resettled in the EU in replacement for an illegal immigrant being taken back from Greece by Turkey. The fact that the EU accepts one refugee only when another refugee has risked their life in a rubber dinghy is madness."

The fact is that the agreement admittedly works to a certain degree, whilst failing elsewhere.

1. It works insofar as the refugee movements towards central Europe have dried up - although the question is whether this is more due to the closure of the Balkan route or rather a result of the EU-Turkey agreement, and how much these aspects complement each other.

2. It also works in terms of the Aegean crossings, which have largely ceased now. At the same time, the refugees who are in Greece on an island or on the mainland today are essentially "trapped", they are often unable to make their way forward and cannot go back. This has also played an important role in the "deal" working: Hardly anyone is taking this route any more, because it is common knowledge that refugees are often forced to spend months in refugee camps on islands, without any opportunity of making progress. This means: They are ultimately marooned in Turkey and other neighbouring states, and the opportunity of last summer - to feel Central European soil under their feet - no longer exists for the majority.

These aspects are therefore working, but it is a cynical form of "working" because they work at the cost of those affected, and also at the cost of Turkey and above all Greece.

Xanthoula Soupli, president of the municipality of Idomeni, remarked: "For months, we were confronted with huge problems on a daily basis. We were unable to resolve them all, because we are a small border town, we had no infrastructure and we were also unable to deliver anything close to optimum living conditions for thousands of refugees; during this time the state left us alone. These people are not animals, and they are not numbers. They have real needs."

Michalis Angelopoulos, Mayor of Samos, added: "Today, tourism - the most important and only 'product' of our island - has declined by 40 percent. In light of the events in Turkey, we will need to reckon with further refugee movements. We are the outposts of Europe. Don't forget that."

The agreement therefore only works at the cost of the neighbouring states, at the cost of Greece, and at the cost of the refugees - which means it is not working at all. Also part of this picture is the fact that important aspects of the plan have not been tackled at all to date.

Gerald Knaus from the think tank European Stability Initiative and one of the central architects of the agreement expressed this in his extremely precise statement of the results. He first agreed that the "One for One" aspect of the agreement - i.e. the contract clause criticised by Korun and others, whereby one Syrian refugee is permitted to resettle in the EU for every Syrian refugee sent back - is the "daftest part of the agreement". According to Knaus: "It is also entirely irrelevant. It has never been implemented. Since March 20th, 14 Syrians have been returned to Turkey from Greece. At the same time, 800 have been able to enter the EU directly from Turkey. 800 is certainly much too low a number, but it clearly demonstrates that the 1:1 principle is entirely unnecessary. We should just give it up."

However, a central part of the agreement - that refugees be permitted to travel in relevant numbers directly from Turkey into the EU - has not yet been tackled. And, according to Knaus, this is not a simple mistake but a breach of contract. The agreement says: "As soon as the crossings have significantly and sustainably reduced, the One for One principle will be cancelled and replaced with something else." Knaus: "And this something else is large-scale resettlement to the EU directly from Turkey."

Legal exodus routes and direct resettlement of refugees in the EU

At the conference, it was widely agreed that this programme of distributing individuals seeking refuge within the EU states needs to be tackled now - at a scale of 250,000 or 500,000 to 800,000 people.

Why is that not happening? Partly for political reasons. Today, a majority of EU government leaders would certainly stand against such an agreement. And no one - no government leader, no group of willing parties and certainly not the EU Commission - is throwing their weight behind implementing this form of resettlement programme. However, despite the negative mood it is not entirely impossible. It is not inconceivable, with a little persuasive effort, that several tens of thousands of people could be resettled in the larger and smaller EU states - and with 27 states this would quickly add up to a few hundred thousand refugees, a number that would not overburden any of the countries.

Why then are the numbers so low? Partly, as previously mentioned, for political reasons - and partly also due to bureaucratic and logistical shortcomings.

"The EU talks in theoretical terms of resettlements - but in reality it does not have the capacities for it" (Knaus). This becomes clear by simply looking at Greece. Hotspots have been organised on the islands, in which the refugees are de facto detained. Many thousands of refugees are also stranded on the Greek mainland. But there are far too few administrators. It was said that this is a shared European responsibility. Germany grandly announced that it would be sending 100 administrators to Greece. In reality, only 8 turned up.

Lefteris Papagiannakis, vice mayor of Athens responsible for asylum matters, adds that Greece itself has absolutely no functioning asylum system and that it clearly started to establish one far too late. At the same time, Greece is de facto forbidden from doing so "because we are simultaneously in an economic crisis and subject to the diktat imposed by the creditor states and a memorandum. The clear upshot is: We are unable to employ anyone. We have small-scale asylum services, very young asylum services, and we can't employ anyone to expand them. We are not allowed to. It is simply prohibited."

The consequence is that even in Greece, thousands of refugees are stuck for much longer than necessary, and are forced to accept that their asylum process will take one to two years.

Josef Weidenholzer, MEP and rapporteur on this subject at the European Parliament, recalls a best practice example in the Humanitarian Corridor initiative, which brought about the legal resettlement of 2,400 people from the Lebanon and Eritrea in Italy, with the support of the Italian government. "This shows that something is possible."

Stranded in Greece

Mohammed Sediq Attaya is a refugee from Kabul who lived in a refugee camp in Piraeus until a few days ago - meaning that he lived in a tent under a bridge. "People live in tents here. There is no shade. The refugees have left everything behind and hope for a better life, but there is nothing here. They are undernourished, weakened, there is no decent food, there are no showers. No one gives them information. The people want to get their bearings and find out what is coming next. But they are literally caught in a trap here in Greece, trying to get to any other European country."

Apostolos Veizis from "Médecins sans Frontières" pointedly adds: "We don't have refugees who are making their way to find refuge any more. We have people who are stranded."

Lora Pappa from the Greek NGO Metaction underlines what this means for children in particular: "Every day that passes like this is a trauma for the children - and these children will stay in Europe." Time passes by and things are made unnecessarily complicated; this will create many problems in the future, which could be easily avoided.

Greece is at the point of adjusting to this situation. Previously, the country was able to assume that refugees were only passing through for a limited period of time. It is now gradually accepting that this issue concerns people, who will be in the country for the longer term. How to deal with this? Build "nice" refugee camps, which, even if they are OK to shelter human beings, are still camps where people are isolated and unable to start living a normal life? Or start with integration measures into local and municipal life, and put to use Central European experiences?

According to Lefteris Papagiannakis, Athens is now formulating an "emergency living programme" together with the UNHCR. "We have leased 200 apartments and with partners we will rent 1,200 apartments in Athens. Social housing must become an important programme. Due to the financial crisis we have many empty apartments in Athens, but it is legally difficult to rent these. It is therefore the case that almost only public buildings are an option at the moment."

Marco Buono, representative of UNHCR in Greece: "It is not relevant for us how long the refugees stay. This is impossible to predict. As long as they are here we should try to offer them every opportunity, so they do not lose time. That would mean integrating them in the local communities, and organising the refugee aid in a way that also has positive effects for the municipalities. For instance renovate apartments instead of constructing refugee camps that we will perhaps no longer need in two years; invest in improved local hospitals and employ two additional doctors there rather than establishing medical stations in refugee camps. Given the financial crisis in Greece, it would be a win-win situation to employ the funds so that both the local population and the refugees can benefit from them."

Many Greek regions are facing a key question, naturally with a different perspective depending on whether the region is a small tourist island or an urban area on the mainland: Integration of the refugees in the communities or the development of camps.

One can naturally also ask the question: "How do you build the perfect refugee camp?" - and that is certainly an important question in many regions around the world. But it would appear that this is wrong question for Greece.

Sotiris Alexopoulos, who operates the refugee camp in Piraeus as an NGO activist, points out that best practice refugee camps do exist. Many refugees are therefore now being relocated from Piraeus to a camp 50 kilometres north of Athens. "A nice place. An old industrial building with 56 rooms for

families. It contains showers, toilets and is a sort of 'model camp'. In order to establish this type of model camp, it is necessary for people to have the opportunity to organise themselves. They need to take care of their own things, clean the house, they have a shared kitchen and they are able to live a normal life as far as possible. Because many of the refugees come from agricultural areas, they even asked if they could keep chickens and other livestock. They now have a chicken farm. It is a camp that I can reasonably say is the most a camp can be. That the people consider to be their place. Where they can feel at home."

This and many other questions were posed and discussed within the context of the EU-Turkey deal. Greece is initially facing questions regarding its concrete integration policy. At the same time, it has become clear that we have created a highly bureaucratic system here in Europe, which works abysmally from a bureaucratic perspective - there is a lack of civil servants, there is a lack of capacity. This leads to refugees becoming stranded and resettlement programmes failing to even start up; even where the political will exists. At the same time, there was a broad consensus among the conference participants, that there is almost no alternative to an agreement of this type. Open exodus routes to central Europe will soon disappear entirely. This alternative simply no longer exists, given the political reality. It is therefore necessary to provide a plan - the primary intention of which was naturally to seal off Europe from the refugee movements - not entirely ignoring the humanitarian challenges. At micro-level in the municipalities and on the islands, and at macro-level through resettlement programmes, through the establishment of a European asylum system, through administrative aid for the acceleration of the asylum process.

In short: There is no Plan B - other than the agreement. But there is not even a Plan A which really works.

As with the conference in Vienna, the majority of discussions regarding practical expertise took place in small groups. A second focus here - alongside the question of the additions required to the Turkey-EU agreement - was placed on integration and education measures.

- The construction of schools in Greece
- The establishment of networks of Syrians already integrated in the EU was proposed, whereby they could act as mentors
- The "job fair" for refugees in Vienna was presented as a best practice example and was received with great interest
- The requirement to find the parents of unaccompanied minors much faster was expressed by all participants
- Likewise the need to find non-bureaucratic solutions and to avoid constantly abiding by impracticable laws. This was discussed on the basis of a mother who is waiting for her admission to the asylum process in Traiskirchen in Austria, whilst her eight-year old daughter - who was separated from her mother whilst fleeing - sits in Piraeus and is unable to legally obtain a visa. Even the Piraeus police remark: "The child belongs with her mother. Why doesn't she just take her with her?"

Declaration of the International Mayors' Conference N-O-W in Athens 2016

Sharing the awareness we are all connected with each other, and believing that we have to listen attentively to each other, Mayors, Members of the European Parliament, representatives of NGOs from Greece, Turkey, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and other European countries have held meetings for two days in Athens to exchange first-hand information about the situation in the region and the repercussions of the EU-Turkey Agreement.

What is presented to us in many European general publics as „solution“ does not work. It is in fact a non-solution which is being enforced on the backs of the refugees and to the detriment of entire regions.

Entire Aegean islands are at risk of mutating into internment zones for refugees from different countries, of which only Syrians stand a chance to be absorbed at some point – and this after a far too long bureaucratic procedure. We have developed a highly complex administrative system – with clearly dysfunctional bureaucracies.

At the present time the EU-Turkey Agreement's only purpose is to prevent human beings seeking refuge from continuing their journey to Central Europe. It is aimed at deterring refugees. The rights of human beings seeking refuge are being ignored, the toll, the costs and the ugly practical implementation are being rolled off onto Greece and Turkey. On the other hand no ways have been found to bring refugees from war zones and displaced persons from neighbouring countries legally, safely and non bureaucratically to receiving countries in Europe. We have established a hard-hearted monster with one aim: deterrence. People flee from one anguish – only to face the next anguish.

We have to change this.

We do not have solutions for everything but we know that what is happening now is no solution. We need to give people seeking refuge a perspective of feeling safe ground under their feet again. These human beings are not numbers - they are diverse individuals. We must not waste another hour if we want to achieve successful integration.

Elements of a solution must be:

We need safe corridors from the neighbouring countries and resettlement programs for hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men.

The objective cannot be to make detention camps a little more liveable. We do not want a Europe of camps, we want a Europe of freedom, doing justice to its values.

The Hotspots in EU border regions must not become long term substandard camps where people are cynically exposed to sheer hopelessness and no prospect other than survive the day: They have to be fully functional, they have to be humane. Each asylum request must be handled fast and humanely respecting human rights. For this we need qualified civil servants from all over Europe. At this early stage the skills and competences of the people seeking refuge should be documented – as well as their wishes and their dreams.

We want a Europe of citizens connected through shared endeavours and in which we can face this great chance hand in hand: integrate the newly arrived, invite them and support them to become our co-citizens in our European societies.

We want a Europe where we can achieve this together instead of acting against each other and to push problems around to and fro.

We are citizens of cities and communes, Mayors, representatives of NGOs and relief organizations, and many individuals – and absorption and integration take place precisely there, in the cities and communes. Our societies have made huge achievements in the past years and had the opportunity to learn a lot. We have been successful in providing housing, education and integration measures, the teachers in our schools have achieved great things – so that hundreds of thousands of people could take essential small and large steps towards a successful new life. Much has worked out well, some things less so.

We want to continue collecting and sharing these experiences and examples, for all these small steps and pieces of puzzle will eventually merge into a big, good overall picture.

Conclusions – Recommendations – Tasks – Requirements

What should be done to make the EU-Turkey Agreement work?

- Evaluation of said agreement, detailed studies, analysis to determine exactly why the implementation of the agreement has failed up to date. This is a question of management
- Turkey must remain a safe third country by European standards
- Drop the 1-for-1 mechanism whereby the EU accepts one Syrian refugee directly from Turkey for each Syrian Boat refugee Ankara takes back from Greece
- Create a European Asylum Support Mission, organized and payed for by Europe, under Greek management, and send 400 asylum case workers to Greece
- Mandate a high level person in the EU with a small team responsible for operating the agreement who is in daily contact with Greece, Italy, Turkey and with the EU commission
- Direct resettlement to the EU from Turkey
- Speed up the relocation rate five times in the next six months, bring up the rate of asylum processing in Greece five times in the next six months, increase resettlement from Turkey and make Turkey safe

What should be done in Greece...

- Upgrade the existing facilities in order to accommodate refugees in a proper and sustainable way, better living conditions for refugees, family life, privacy, finance, etc
- Allocation of funds to Greek municipalities enabling them to work with and for the refugees and the local population
- Improve communication with the refugee population, the local communities, of these two communities with each other and of course to the public
- Provide a sense of security to local communities
- Sustainable investment into the local communities instead of into temporary refugee infrastructure, invest resources (doctors, teachers, refurbishing) into local infrastructure (hospitals, schools, housing) to serve both the local and the refugee communities
- Incentives for local communities like tax exemptions or infrastructure development grants
- Let refugees take part in organising their daily life and needs (cook, translate, medical care, education etc.)
- The time refugees spend in Greece should be time well spent for them and not wasted
- The 50.000 refugees stranded in Greece from before the deal but after the border closings must not be forgotten
- Equal distribution of refugees in Greece

What should be done in the European Union?

- Agreement on a common and well defined approach to European migration in practice and in reality
- Communication to 500 million European Union citizens that it is in the interest of our European societies to have a controlled and safe way of temporary immigration
- A coalition of the willing
- Creation of a real common European asylum system
- Revision of the Dublin Regulation and concrete quotas for EU member states in view of resettlement, financed with European money
- Incentives to motivate EU governments to take responsibility for humanitarian issues and provide support from the European Union.
- Processes based on facts, figures, analysis, knowledge for granting admission, asylum, relocation, resettlement, or return
- Establishment of a European policy on migration, asylum and resettlement with proper instruments overriding national policies
- Political will of the European leaders to implement large scale resettlement
- Legally sound reception structures at entry points in the EU, like the Italian Humanitarian Corridor
- Creation of legal and safe migration routes
- Laying the foundations for legal economic migration
- Agreement on an effective return policy
- Establishment of a special registration system and procedures for unaccompanied minors
- A differentiation between migrants is inevitable – it will be crucial to find humanitarian solutions
- Redesign of procedures for identification, education or asylum with a humanitarian approach
- Lesser rights for illegal immigrants (they have right to protection, but for instance not the right to family reunification or permanent residence) than for legal immigrants

What should be done in general?

- The fact is that there are 65 million refugees world wide, 1.3 million came to Europe, that is 2% of the world's refugees, and: People on the move are like water, trying to stop them is impossible
- Open safe and legal migration routes so as to put human traffickers out of business
- Strive for peace in the Middle East and Asia Minor regions, fight terrorism
- Develop sustainable programs
- Grant refugees and migrants basic rights like education, information
- Human rights-based integration needs participation of all parties involved
- Involve fellow countrymen who have longer experience in living in Europe in integration measures for refugees
- Motivate young people to work in refugee-related jobs (camps, education, etc.) instead of military service
- House refugees close to the institutions administrating their status instead of in remote camps
- Provide refugees with reliable information about procedures, waiting times, opportunities, rights
- Prepare for possible future crises of this kind
- See the opportunities in the integration of refugees

- Establish and promote social cohesion between refugees and local communities, build bridges connecting the two realities
- Set up talent-databases of refugees
- Study, document and prevent crime in refugee camps
- Establish regular contacts between politicians and refugees
- Connect refugees with professionals for job opportunities
- Help the helpers on the frontline (NGOs)
- Share best practice examples in Europe, connect the dots (countries experienced with immigration with those that don't)
- Define standards for well functioning refugee camps
- Separate security agendas from humanitarian response
- Increase funding & support for women (access to IT, language courses, child care, education)
- Establish programs to find foster families for unaccompanied minors
- Transform the public debate into narratives



PANEL 1 – The EU-Turkey Agreement

Chair

Maria Eleni Koppa, Former MEP, GR

Key Note

Gerald Knaus, Founding Chairman, European Stability Initiative, AT/D

Participants

Maria Elena Koppa, Former MEP, GR

Hannes Swoboda, Curator of the conference, Former MEP, AT

Luigi Ammatuna, Mayor of Pozzallo, IT

Michalis Angelopoulos, Mayor of Samos, GR

Kenan Güngör, International expert for Integration and Diversity, [think.difference], AT

Gerald Knaus, Founding Chairman, European Stability Initiative, AT/D

Katalin Piri, MEP, Rapporteur from Turkey to the EU, NL

Lefteris Papagiannakis, Vice Mayor of Athens, Department for Immigrants, GR

Mustafa Tosun, Mayor of Dikili, TR

Aitor Zabalgogezkoa, Doctors Without Borders Turkey, TR

Summaries

Maria Elena Koppa, Professor, Former MEP, GR

It is obvious that the objective of the deal is to act as a deterrent. Do not use illegal means to enter the EU because you will be returned back. If you are lawful you have a chance to go to the EU. It is simple, it is clear.

What makes the deal most precarious is the word “voluntary”, concerning whether EU countries will accept refugees and up to what number. What if the agreement fails? We will be faced with a new wave of refugees stranded and stuck in Greece. **We must be honest with ourselves, the problem is not what Turkey is or what Turkey does but the absolute lack of political will on behalf of the European leaders to deal with the problem.**



Gerald Knaus, Founding Chairman, European Stability Initiative, AT/D

Last year some 870,000 people crossed from Turkey to Greece.

Far right parties started saying openly: “let's get rid of the refugee convention”. The EU-Turkey agreement is an alternative to this widespread attitude.

What needs to happen urgently now is to make this agreement work.

Turkey is today the country with the highest number of refugees in the world.

There will never again be an open Balkan route. If the deal breaks now and more refugees come into Greece, the whole of South East Europe will be destabilized.

What we should all push for is a EU Asylum Support Mission. Those who get asylum shouldn't have to stay in Greece, they should be relocated immediately. The EU should take over responsibility for those who are not granted asylum. Greece could control this but Europe should finance and organize it.

Europe cannot leave this problem in Greece or in Turkey.

The deal with the Turkish Government was not based on trust. It was based on interests.

Until now no one who applied for asylum in Greece has been sent back because the Greek asylum authorities have simply not come to the decision that Turkey is a safe third country.

The other thing that has not happened: fulfilling the promise to Turkey and to refugees that there will be a voluntary resettlement of refugees directly from Turkey.

Non-Syrians, Afghans, Pakistanis and others are just stuck. Nobody offers them any sort of prospect. This is true also for the more than 45,000 refugees on the Greek mainland.

The agreement turns out to be shocking failure. We need detailed studies, analyses by NGOs, researchers, think tanks and the European institutions to examine exactly why. This is a question of management. Any Champions League football game is organized better than this.

The EU must develop instruments for fast, quick resettlement of large numbers and the capacities to take a few hundred of thousand people per year, it's good for the refugees, it's good for the EU.

Katalin Piri, MEP, Rapporteur from Turkey to the EU, NL

After the closing down of the Balkan route European leaders think that the problem is solved and the political willingness to do large-scale resettlement has completely vanished.

The question “is Turkey a safe country and a safe third country?” is even more relevant after the attempted coup.

We need to ask: What is the Plan B? We saw every attempt fail because of total lack of solidarity among the EU member states. Also now when we propose to revise the Dublin Regulation, we see no willingness to come up with compulsory quota in the EU. We are blocking each other from moving on.

There are no legal routes for refugees. From a refugee perspective, this is catastrophic. At least before this deal you had the option to risk your life, at least you had the choice.

A good alternative would be a genuine European asylum system. The EU is losing its credibility by making migration the focus of its foreign policy instead of solving the crises we are talking about.



Lefteris Papagiannakis, Vice Mayor of Athens, Department for Immigrants, GR

There is no plan B. The situation in Turkey is very unstable. We are talking about a country that is starting procedures to bring back the death penalty. So if Turkey wants to make a power play and opens the borders for just one day, the system will collapse.

Greece could 150,000 people, 250,000 people even. If you have the system you can manage it, but if you don't, it's impossible. And that's when it becomes a crisis.

For the rest of Europe, it was the same. Germany has an excellent asylum system but when you have 800,000 people coming in eight months, the system collapses and it will take years to process everyone. And that's what worries the Germans, it is not the lack of a system, it is the limitations of that system. Greece had no system at all.

The EU must create a legal way of migration, a common asylum system

Greece is being treated like a third world country. We are using tools used in Africa and the Middle East - this is unheard of in Europe. But we knew that this would come and we didn't do anything. This is one of the main failures of Europe, in every major political crisis Europe is being caught with her pants down....



Michalis Angelopoulos, Mayor of Samos, GR

... In October 2015, 28,167 refugees arrived on the island of Samos... this July we had only 36 arrivals. This is a victory of numbers that can confirm the implementation of the agreement. The European Union is under the spell of the magic of numbers.

European institutions, the commission have to decide and then also monitor which subsidies and European funds are going where.



Mustafa Tosun, Mayor of Dikili, TR

Right across Samos I represent a population of 17,000 people in Dikili, from where thousands travelled to Samos.

We tried to provide the refugees with food, health care and clothes. We had no support at all and in the end we couldn't provide the basic services to our local residents.

The memories of those children washed up ashore will never leave our memories. We are very upset and we don't know what to do.

In 2014 the EU knew what was going to unfold. My party actually signed this agreement on readmission, but there is an ongoing bartering between humans - using humans - and I deeply deplore this.



Luigi Ammatuna, Mayor of Pozzallo, IT

The deal between the EU and Turkey does not solve anything. It was only used to roll over responsibility to two countries, Greece and Turkey.

Having people arriving only in Greece or Italy, having people remaining there, not being resettled to other European countries is something that will finally turn against Greece and Italy.

So what should we do? We have to create conditions so that they no longer want to flee those countries. We have to stop wars. This is the only way to avoid this human tide moving from North Africa and the Middle East towards Europe.



In Europe we have many unaccompanied minors. So, what makes a father, what makes a mother put their children in a boat and risk their lives to cross the sea? If you analyze the reasons, you will realize that it is our human obligation to accept these people, to contribute to a better future for them.

Aitor Zabalgogezkoa, Doctors Without Borders Turkey, TR

Probably the agreement is not going to work. It's not going to work because it is based on the wrong thesis. This is not a refugee crisis. There is a brutal war in the Levant. A brutal war, affecting 40 million people practically in walking distance from Europe, from Turkey, from Lebanon, from Germany. It is still ongoing, is not going to go away tomorrow.



Syria and part of Iraq is a killing zone. There's no way to deter people from fleeing wars... The deal, if it's working, aims at containing the people inside the crisis area. This could work up to a certain point. But this point will be reached one day soon.

Kenan Güngör, International expert for Integration and Diversity, [think.difference], AT

The agreement with Turkey is just another crisis management program, not a sustainable program.

At a time when we need the highest solidarity in Europe, we have the highest level of de-solidarisation, the public debate is very much driven by fear, by resentment. But: A comprehensive survey conducted two months ago in all European countries shows that 85% of the people in all its member states are for a fair distribution of refugees. So it's completely different to the official discussion we have. On the other hand, 78% in the whole European Union say, "We want control of the borders. When we have control of the borders, then we are able to work with resettlement."



...It doesn't look like an agreement that could hold long term. So we have to look for an alternative. The worst-case scenario may be that the border shifts from Turkey to Greece. That we have a closing of the border to Greece, and Greece will have the function of Turkey.

Hannes Swoboda, Curator of the conference, Former MEP, AT

There is a plan B, and there are people waiting to implement it: Orban, Le Pen, AfD in Germany. This is the worst that can happen in Europe because it abrogates the concept of Human Rights.





Chair

Alev Korun, Member of the Austrian Parliament, AT

Key Note

Josef Weidenholzer, Member of the European Parliament, AT

Participants

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Mohammed Ali, Refugee, Syria
Sediq Attaya, Refugee, Afghanistan
Can Gülcü, Board member SOS Mitmensch, AT
Xanthoula Soupli, President Municipality of Idomeni, GR
Apostolos Veizis, Doctors Without Borders Greece, GR
Josef Weidenholzer, Member of the European Parliament, AT
Matteo Zevi, Stichting Bootvluchteling | Boat Refugee Foundation, NL

Summaries

Josef Weidenholzer, Member of the European Parliament, AT

We only stick to our national policies. We are completely surprised that people want to come to Europe. Instead of accepting or even welcoming that we are attractive for other parts of the world, we got scared. We never delivered a European policy on the community level.



We have a made complete mess of our instruments and that's the problem

- Normal migration, which is wanted – is not being addressed. We don't have immigration policies like Canada or the US. We don't have a green card, blue card or the like that is really working.
- Asylum - a completely different process, which was created in the aftermath of World War 2, is an individual right. It is certainly not the right way to address the migration question, simply because it's a different instrument.
- Displaced persons in increasing numbers need to be addressed with a migration policy, an asylum policy, a resettlement policy.

We need to open legal avenues - It must be possible that people are moving by legal means without smuggling, just by applying for entry at certain entry points of the European Union (the Italian

Humanitarian Corridor brought more than 2,400 people from Lebanon and Eritrea to Italy, supported by the Italian government.)

Get relocation started - there are states interested to take in people from Greece, from Italy

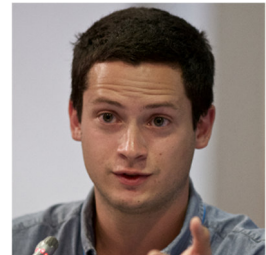
Refugees and migrants are humans, individuals who have rights

We have to work harder on human rights-based integration, it needs participation, people with the same background who already live in European countries should be involved

Matteo Zevi, Stichting Bootvluchteling | Boat Refugee Foundation, NL/IT

For a passage into Europe as a refugee it is assumed that there will be delays and paperwork. But delays have become so long, the conditions are so negative that their mental and physical health is at risk and the refugees pay with a huge amount of lifetime.

It's rather cheap for politicians to dehumanize refugees and to say these are numbers, or we've controlled the numbers. It's much more expensive to engage people on the ground, to pay for accommodation, for supplies. It's expensive for small organizations, for large organizations, for governments. It's very expensive to humanize.



The people closest to the crisis seem to be the most humane, the least humane attitudes and the most unpleasant things said are coming from the countries farthest away.

Why do governments in Europe spend so much money to make young people do military service? Why not spend that money to send them to work in refugee camps, think about these issues and go home and spread the good news?

Xanthoula Soupli, President Municipality of Idomeni, GR

We hosted so many hopes for an exit to new a home, to the goods of freedom, respect of human rights and dignified living conditions.

We accommodated thousands of people in our region and by their side we truly experienced an ordeal. The dream of escaping was turned into a nightmare, which we are reminded of every day just by looking at this fence. In the collective memory of the refugee situation Idomeni is indelibly marked with unfulfilled expectations and agonies caused by the shutdown of the border.



Mohammed Ali, Refugee, Syria

If you don't want to be a fighter, you have to run away. I chose to leave Syria, to leave everything.

When we arrived here, the Greek people treated us very well, as brothers. Unfortunately we did not find the same humanity in the EU procedures whether it's identification or education or asylum. We still live in tents under a bridge in Piraeus.



Sediq Attaya, Refugee, Afghanistan

I've been working for International Security Assistance Force and NATO for three years that's why I left Afghanistan five months ago. During my trip I faced serious threats. In the closed camps they had food, showers and clothes, but it felt like jail.

Since I'm here in Athens I try to help people translate for the volunteers of different NGOs and assist people around me. The life conditions in Piraeus under the bridge are really not good. The people don't get information about their future. They are just stuck right here in Greece.



Apostolos Veizis, Doctors Without Borders Greece, GR

Poor admission conditions, detentions, pushbacks, closings and openings of borders: this has been the main menu that the EU and other states around the world offered to the people on the move. The suffering goes on to the level of ill treatment and torture. It really hurts to see that this is intentional.

We're seeing people queuing, queuing to the toilet, queuing for the food, queuing, queuing.

If you manage public health, you manage the life of people. Today, we don't have many people on the move, we have stranded people in camps in Greece not meeting even minimum standards, 40% of which are children.

To believe that by making their lives more miserable, less people will come, is something that does not work and never will.

Europe is proud to help and give life support to Sudan and the Central African Republic, and cannot provide it on its own territory? It is on purpose, not because they cannot. This is due to lack of political will, hiding behind numbers, hiding from a situation that is manageable.



Can Gülcü, Board member SOS Mitmensch, AT

It touches the human condition of our times. We try to give a lot of pragmatic answers to very complex questions. Pragmatism is a good idea but giving pragmatic answers to every question we have is a disease of a very bureaucratic mindset.

We try to find answers, but the conclusion always is that there's no alternative.

We're talking very little about ideas. We have to talk about how we want to live, how we want to define transgenerational relations, transnational relations, transcultural relations.



Sotiris Alexopoulos, Refugees Welcome to Piraeus, GR

We are a team of volunteers, most come from the solidarity movement in Greece. Since 2010 there are some 1,5 million unemployed in my country. Some of us got together and said, "Okay, we can't just sit back and watch things happening", so we tried to identify the major problems of the Greek refugees.



I like to compare the refugees who came from the sea to the refugees who were created here. You don't need to move countries to become a refugee. You can be a refugee in your own country. We unfortunately have a lot of local refugees here, Greeks and non-Greeks.

When in February the borders were closed for Afghans, and later for the Syrians, we found ourselves with a makeshift camp in our hands, we had the infrastructure there, we had access to the buildings, but then we had the problem of feeding them. In a cooperation, which was quite admirable, of churches, businesses, football clubs - in one word: society - stepped in. It was an amazing experience and it's a proof that society may fill the gap for the failed state.

These people are not here as tourists, they must take care of the paper work that is required to improve their lives. Therefore, it's a mistake to send them to remote camps in the mountains. They need to be near big cities where there are facilities for applying for asylum.



Chair

Hannes Swoboda, Curator of the conference, Former MEP, AT

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Lefteris Papagiannakis, Vice Mayor of Athens, Department for Immigrants, GR
Katalin Piri, MEP, Rapporteur from Turkey to the EU, NL

Summaries

Hannes Swoboda, Curator of the conference, Former MEP, AT

...If we tell our citizens everything is bad, they will not listen to us. If we tell them things can and should be improved for all of us, not only for one group, then I believe we can be heard.



Dimitrios Karalis, Deputy Mayor of Chios, GR

It is most important to specify the capacity of Europe. How many people are in need, how many people do we need, how many people can we afford to take.

The next outbreak of the crisis should not find us without a plan A or B or C, whatever. In my opinion we must focus on four things:

- Upgrade the existing facilities in order to accommodate refugees in a proper and sustainable way, better living conditions for refugees, family life, privacy, a little money...
- Ensure the sense of security of local communities



- **Provide incentives like tax exemptions and infrastructure development to local communities facing the consequences of the refugee crisis**
- **Improve communication: to the refugee population, to the local communities, the communication between these two communities with each other and of course to the public**

Marco Buono, Head of Field Office, UNHCR Thessaloniki, GR

Greece is going through a painful economic crisis where resources are already limited for the local population

We started with the assumption that these people are staying only for a short time, but now we should say “No matter how long they stay, but as long as they are here, it should be beneficial to them, not a waste of time”



Consider the local economy: instead of building camps that tomorrow, hopefully, we will not need, we should invest in the local community.

Why build medical centres in the camps? Invest money in the local hospitals! Doctors will serve both the refugee and the local communities.

Why distribute food? Give cash to the refugees and let them buy what they want, instead of us deciding what they want to eat every day - this is dignity. The local community will have fifty thousand new customers, money that goes through the Greek economy.

Why camps? There are plenty of empty hotels, empty apartments!

Why build schools in the camps, when there are plenty of empty schools because there are no children.

If we believe that there is an advantage, then we have to communicate this.

Hassan Manssour, Refugee, Syria

Let refugees participate in the organization: we started to make and give out 1,500 fresh sandwiches everyday)

Give the young generation a chance to be educated, they are going to be our future here in Europe, or back home in Syria



Anthony Papadimitriou, External Relations Counsellor to the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE), GR

We need a real common and well-defined European migration policy. All member states need to respect and agree on a common approach in practice, in reality.

We need reallocations of funds in order to enable municipalities to do their work. Up to now they haven't been part of the refugee work institutionally. Out of the 240 million Euros given for refugee assistance to Greece, municipalities got a bare 4.8 million.



Speed up the asylum procedures. Greece needs some assistance here in order to have more police, more asylum personnel, coast guards.

Michael Chalupka, Director Diakonie Austria, AT

We need governments who feel obliged to receive refugees in a decent way respecting their dignity.

Broad resettlement to Europe is the key to the solution of the refugee problem, to a rate of say 500,000 people a year, so that people can decide: "Do I want to take the legal route or do I want to risk my life with smugglers"?

The Italian humanitarian corridors have shown that it is possible to guarantee regular entries through legislative instruments already made available by the European Union thus avoiding risky journeys of hope. The project can be replicated in other countries in partnership with civil society organizations.

We are much too defensive in our discourse about refugees. Democratic Europe will not win the battle against right extremism in the field of refugees. Labour, justice, welfare state, housing: these are the fields where we have to win.



Lefteris Papagiannakis, Vice Mayor of Athens, Department for Immigrants, GR

The refugees will stay in Greece for long. So we work on integration as a municipality and we need to work with the local population as well to ensure social cohesion.

The cities do most of the integration work. The mayor of Athens has launched an initiative called the Solidarity Citizen Network involving all the capitals of the EU member states. In April all capitals signed, even Budapest and Prague. Through that initiative we hope that we can have an exchange of good practice examples and policy and put pressure on the European Union.



We are starting to profile and to differentiate. Step by step we are diminishing the chances of people to be granted asylum, not a good solution. Afghanistan is at war for 45 years now, and we are discussing if Afghans come from the war zone. This is plainly hypocritical.

Gerald Knaus, Founding Chairman, European Stability Initiative, AT/D

What can be done depends on the resources.

The sooner we are realistic and clarify how to bring up the relocation rate five times in the next six months, how to bring up the rate of processing in Greece, how to increase resettlement from Turkey and how to make Turkey safe, the sooner we will have a specific plan - the better for everyone.

What we realistically aim for in the next two months is a European Asylum Support Mission sending 400 asylum case workers to Greece whose job it is to immediately and quickly conduct interviews and full asylum procedures. They can manage 6,000 cases a month.



Alev Korun, Member of the Austrian Parliament, AT

What we need now is a coalition of the willing.

We need to communicate to 500 million European Union citizens that it is in the best interest of our European societies to have a controlled and safe way for people to come here.

I suggest replacing the Dublin system by a system of incentives that makes European Union governments take responsibility for humanitarian issues.

What we also need in Europe is a system for legal economic migration.



Katalin Piri, MEP, Rapporteur from Turkey to the EU, NL

We must bring back solidarity among the citizens of Europe

We must continue investing in improving the lives of refugees also in the region, in Lebanon, in Jordan, in Turkey, and in the rest of the world. 96% of the refugees stay in the region.

There needs to be a differentiation between people fleeing war and those who to Europe come for other reasons. More strictness when it comes to economic migration or else this is really killing solidarity in our societies...

We need to focus not only on refugees but also much more on the local communities to make sure that our society can function as one society without dividing lines.



Political challenges for Communities in TR/GR/ITA

Host: Mustafa Tonsun, Mayor of Dikili, TR

- Organize refugee work well and communicate the advantages to the people in the local communities.
- Local community needs have to be combined with needs of refugees
- Invest a lot of effort
- Empower the communities, the EU should give money and resources directly to the communities
- Stop improvising and start organizing
- Give advantages and incentives to those communities who care

Current and Future Migration Movements - Are closed borders a viable option?

Host: Sonal Shinde, Mercy Corps, USA

- The refugees face lots of problems: involvement of the mafia, kidnappings, trafficking of guns, drugs, women, children etc. People want a better life, criminals take advantage of the situation and corruption is created
- In source countries they do not know the truth because the refugees will not tell their families back home how bad things are because these are proud societies. We have to be more innovative and create new communication methods
- If people have no other choice they will go on risking their lives
- If receiving countries establish a migration plan based e.g. on skills and the economies, it can benefit everyone
- We need more integration options, communication and better information
- In 2010 in Austria an effort was made to change attitudes towards migrants. African groups worked for people to bring their voice to the public and it helped change attitudes
- In the refugee communities many lies circulate like "Go to Romania, they will take you to Australia". They believe the lies because are desperate. There is no official communication at an official level on what is going on, so they are left to manipulation
- Corporations, private agencies develop apps for refugees, as they are using mobile technologies

Where does integration start?

Host: Mohamed Ali, Refugee, Syria

- Integration really starts with finding an efficient trafficker - unfortunately
- In Greece relations between Syrian and Afghan refugees are tense because of the different treatment the two communities receive
- Without permanent residence one cannot become part of the hosting society
- The procedures are much too slow, it takes 3.5 months to get pre-registration papers
- Refugee life starts with contact with organized crime/ smugglers, it continues with the solving of conflicts between refugee groups and the handling of problems with officials
- A room to live in and the acquisition of legal status in the host country are essential for integration, the golden key is languages
- The integration process should start early as children adapt quickly, education needs to be provided

- Create networks of Syrians in the EU in order to support newly arriving refugees

Mother and Child refugees in TR/GR/ITA

Host: Xanthoula Soupli, Idomeni Community President, GR

- Refugees lost everything, their trauma might last forever
- Measures should be addressed to the most vulnerable. Women and children should get access to technology, for communication and learning languages. All the mobile phones are in the hands of
- Some children speak 5 languages and act as translators
- A health passport should be established, so that wherever they go doctors will know about medical examinations and vaccinations they have had
- Nutritional counselling, i.e. about how to feed babies is necessary
- Special care is needed for unaccompanied children
- Women do not have money, some resort to prostitution. There have been reported cases of rape. 65 per cent of the refugee population is mothers with children.
- Facilitate the procedures for reunification of family members.

Future Economic Chances/Challenges

Host: Henri Van Eeghen, Senior Director Mercy Corps, USA

- Studies on migrants and economy state that in general their contribution is lower because they earn less and pay less taxes, not because they receive more benefits
- Displacement cheapens labor, US studies with Mexicans show that they are lowering the average wage
- Where refugees outnumber locals, the strain on health, education etc. is great. More people sharing resources affect the local ecology, infrastructure, etc. This is more relevant in less developed countries
- Preconditions for integration: structured processes, schooling, early involvement (doctors may need to work as nurses, but better be pragmatic). Education is central for participation.
- New instruments such as impact bonds have an accelerating effect, organizations receive funding when outcomes prove positive, e.g. education has increased
- Include the corporate world (the Dutch ambassador supported incubator companies in GR, a French microfinance plan for refugees is underway)
- Perception in communities is very important. Create an inclusive mindset or create friction because of sinking average wages
- It is important to create positive perceptions
- In addition to responding to immediate needs, invest in creating structures. Humanitarian assistance is needed but also preparations for mid and long terms
- It is essential to have early action in the camps
- Informal opportunities to formal integration: access to the bank system
- Job fair for refugees
- Microfinance
- Possibilities of creating small businesses in the community (shop, barber, etc.)

Political framework for social/cultural changes

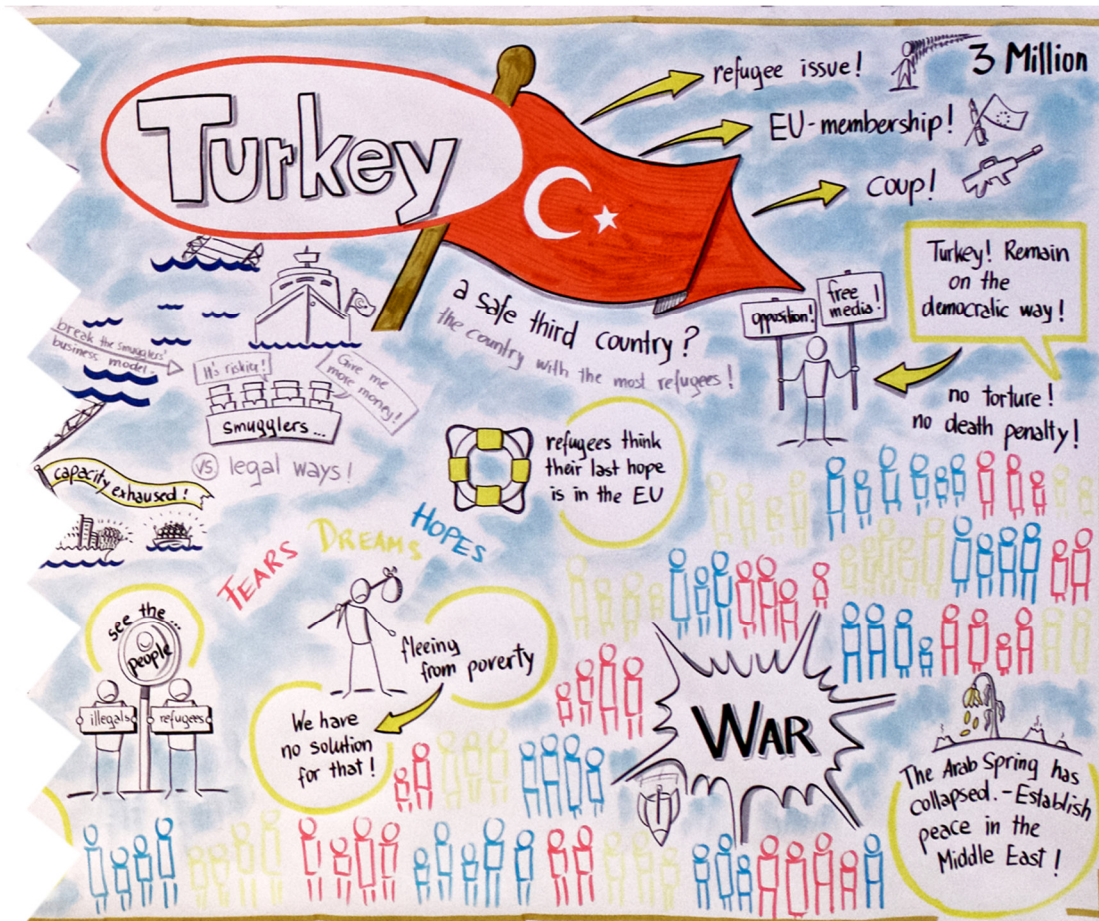
Host: Michael Chalupka, Director Diakonie Austria, AT

- Push for strengthening the resettlement process, systematic resettlements should be the first step taken, not the second
- A common policy in the European Union is needed
- We can't stop working and wait, we need to act now
- In Italy, Morocco and Lebanon, reception stations for refugees were put up, providing visas issued on humanitarian grounds, in order to enable them to enter the EU legally. This procedure is called Humanitarian Corridor
- The issue for Greece is managing the refugees who are here and will stay in large numbers
- A special procedure for family reunification needs to be set up
- Legal routes for refugees to come to Europe
- Common responsibility for the EU borders

Better political communication practices

Host: Can Gülcü, Board member SOS Mitmensch, AT

- Transform the public debate into narratives
- Up to now refugees are seen as objects in the political debate, they need to be engaged in the debate
- Victimization of refugees in the debate: there is a need for a communication strategy to empower them, to make their potential and their needs visible
- Refugees need to communicate with communities, communities need to speak to each other
- When politicians have no clear picture, populism will rise.



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Founded	December 2015
Partner	Patricia Kahane, André Heller, Elke Zuckermann
Managing director	Mia Hulla
Websites	www.act-n-o-w.com www.now-conference.org
Line of business	We initiate projects for a respectful and appreciative social coexistence internationally with a focus on international conferences.
Who we are	Act.Now is an enterprise based on the private initiative of the founders acting internationally and above party lines. Our office is located in Vienna.
What we want	We want to contribute to a respectful and appreciative coexistence in a time of profound social changes that result in challenges to democratic systems.
What we do	<p>Act.Now supports people to take on more responsibility in their respective environment.</p> <p>Act.Now connects people and initiatives to raise the effectiveness of projects aimed to strengthen social cohesion.</p> <p>Act.Now provides information about social change and its impact on society to promote new solutions.</p> <p>To achieve its objectives Act.Now employs processes that are both cognitively and emotionally effective.</p>

NOW Conferences

Vienna, January 2016	<p>The first N-O-W International Mayors' Conference was held in January 2016 in Vienna. At that gathering, mayors from local authorities along refugee routes (Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Austria, Germany), representatives of NGOs and people who had been forced to flee their homeland met for the first time to discuss practical solutions at local level.</p> <p>For details see http://now-conference.org/</p>
Athens, July 2016	<p>The implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement to handle migration flows poses huge challenges for local communities in border regions. Mayors from affected municipalities in Greece, Turkey and Italy met to assess this agreement, together with representatives of NGOs, members of the European Parliament, experts and refugees. Also joining the conference was Gerald Knaus, head of the European Stability Initiative (ESI), who originally drafted the EU-Turkey agreement proposal.</p> <p>The conference was hosted by Hannes Swoboda, former MEP, and currently a board member of the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue in Vienna.</p>



European Council
Council of the European Union

PRESS RELEASE
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18/03/2016

EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016

Today the Members of the European Council met with their Turkish counterpart. This was the third meeting since November 2015 dedicated to deepening Turkey-EU relations as well as addressing the migration crisis.

The Members of the European Council expressed their deepest condolences to the people of Turkey following the bomb attack in Ankara on Sunday. They strongly condemned this heinous act and reiterated their continued support to fight terrorism in all its forms.

Turkey and the European Union reconfirmed their commitment to the implementation of their joint action plan activated on 29 November 2015. Much progress has been achieved already, including Turkey's opening of its labour market to Syrians under temporary protection, the introduction of new visa requirements for Syrians and other nationalities, stepped up security efforts by the Turkish coast guard and police and enhanced information sharing. Moreover, the European Union has begun disbursing the 3 billion euro of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey for concrete projects and work has advanced on visa liberalisation and in the accession talks, including the opening of Chapter 17 last December. On 7 March 2016, 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 also agreed to continue stepping up measures against migrant smugglers and welcomed the establishment of the NATO activity on the Aegean Sea. At the same time Turkey and the EU recognise that further, swift and determined efforts are needed.

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 today decided to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. In order to achieve this goal, they agreed on the following additional action points:

1) All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. This will take place in full accordance with EU and international law, thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion. All migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant

international standards and in respect of the principle of non-refoulement. It will be a temporary and extraordinary measure which is necessary to end the human suffering and restore public order. Migrants arriving in the Greek islands will be duly registered and any application for asylum will be processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, in cooperation with UNHCR. Migrants not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive will be returned to Turkey. Turkey and Greece, assisted by EU institutions and agencies, will take the necessary steps and agree any necessary bilateral arrangements, including the presence of Turkish officials on Greek islands and Greek officials in Turkey as from 20 March 2016, to ensure liaison and thereby facilitate the smooth functioning of these arrangements. The costs of the return operations of irregular migrants will be covered by the EU.

2) For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria. A mechanism will be established, with the assistance of the Commission, EU agencies and other Member States, as well as the UNHCR, to ensure that this principle will be implemented as from the same day the returns start. Priority will be given to migrants who have not previously entered or tried to enter the EU irregularly. On the EU side, resettlement under this mechanism will take place, in the first instance, by honouring the commitments taken by Member States in the conclusions of Representatives of the Governments of Member States meeting within the Council on 20 July 2015, of which 18.000 places for resettlement remain. Any further need for resettlement will be carried out through a similar voluntary arrangement up to a limit of an additional 54.000 persons. The Members of the European Council welcome the Commission's intention to propose an amendment to the relocation decision of 22 September 2015 to allow for any resettlement commitment undertaken in the framework of this arrangement to be offset from non-allocated places under the decision. Should these arrangements not meet the objective of ending the irregular migration and the number of returns come close to the numbers provided for above, this mechanism will be reviewed. Should the number of returns exceed the numbers provided for above, this mechanism will be discontinued.

3) Turkey will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening from Turkey to the EU, and will cooperate with neighbouring states as well as the EU to this effect.

4) Once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU are ending or at least have been substantially and sustainably reduced, a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme will be activated. EU Member States will contribute on a voluntary basis to this scheme.

5) The fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap will be accelerated vis-à-vis all participating Member States with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens at the latest by the end of June 2016, provided that all benchmarks have been met. To this end Turkey will take the necessary steps to fulfil the remaining requirements to allow the Commission to make, following the required assessment of compliance with the benchmarks, an appropriate proposal by the end of April on the basis of which the European Parliament and the Council can make a final decision.

6) The EU, in close cooperation with Turkey, will further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and ensure funding of further projects for persons under temporary protection identified with swift input from Turkey before the end of March. A first list of concrete projects for refugees, notably in the field of health, education, infrastructure, food and other living costs, that can be swiftly financed from the Facility, will be jointly identified within a week. Once these resources are about to be used to the full, and provided the above commitments are met, the EU will mobilise additional funding for the Facility of an additional 3 billion euro up to the end of 2018.

7) The EU and Turkey welcomed the ongoing work on the upgrading of the Customs Union.

8) The EU and Turkey reconfirmed their commitment to re-energise the accession process as set out in their joint statement of 29 November 2015. They welcomed the opening of Chapter 17 on 14 December 2015 and decided, as a next step, to open Chapter 33 during the Netherlands presidency. They welcomed that the Commission will put forward a proposal to this effect in April. Preparatory work for the opening of other Chapters will continue at an accelerated pace without prejudice to Member States' positions in accordance with the existing rules.

9) The EU and its Member States will work with Turkey in any joint endeavour to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria, in particular in certain areas near the Turkish border which would allow for the local population and refugees to live in areas which will be more safe.

All these elements will be taken forward in parallel and monitored jointly on a monthly basis.

The EU and Turkey decided to meet again as necessary in accordance with the joint statement of 29 November 2015.

Links

YouTube

Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMcwdoWgUXM2pK-DZLm2CaQ>

Panel1 (Part 1/2): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC8XhUbgzfg>

Panel1 (Part 2/2): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQi98byNOoU>

Panel2 (Part 1/2): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vYhCqHW6cU>

Panel2 (Part 2/2): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za7TYnsv_bA

Panel3 (Part 3/1): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVFS68n5kb4>

Panel3 (Part 3/2): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54_FZ5TNGYw

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