



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Unit A3: International Coordination  
Head of Unit

Brussels,  
HOME.A3/RC ARES (2016)

**SUBJECT: STOP EU-TURKEY DEAL! A CITIZEN PETITION ADDRESSED TO YOU**

Dear Petitioner,

Thank you for your petition addressed to President Juncker in relation to the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March.

To begin, please allow me to underline that saving lives and ensuring that protection is available to those in need is indeed the basis of our asylum policy. Not only has the smuggling of refugees and migrants caused the death of many persons at sea and an increase in the number of criminal gangs organising the smuggling, it has also severely put under pressure both the asylum systems of many EU and Western Balkan countries as well as the Schengen system overall. It is precisely with these concerns in mind that the European Commission has not stood by idly but has proposed several measures to better manage the disproportionate irregular migration flows which reached the EU last year.

On the one hand, the objective has been to better manage migration inside the EU, by alleviating the pressure on frontline Member States such as Greece and Italy through emergency relocation mechanisms, by tripling the resources and capacity of Frontex's joint operations Triton and Poseidon, and by dismantling the smuggling networks.

On the other, the Commission has continued to work on a more regional and global solution to address the root causes of irregular migration. In that context, the EU-Turkey Statement<sup>1</sup> of 18 March 2016 was jointly agreed by the Heads of State or Governments of the EU Member States and Turkey to reduce the irregular and, most importantly, dangerous migration route which over the course of less than one year has meant that approximately 1 million people have irregularly arrived in the Greek islands from Turkish territory.

The Statement is built upon the full respect of EU and international laws, and both sides have clearly expressed their commitment to implement the Statement while ensuring full respect for the rights of refugees and migrants. The European Commission continues to monitor its implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkey-statement/>

The Statement foresaw the engagement of Turkish authorities to step up their efforts to prevent irregular departures from their coasts and to readmit all persons who have arrived irregularly in the Greek islands from Turkey from 20 March 2016. This has broken the deadly business of the smugglers. The Statement also foresaw the creation of legal pathways for Syrian refugees to enter the EU from Turkey, initially through a 1:1 resettlement scheme, and subsequently through a humanitarian admission programme. This is based on the clear understanding that the situation as it was until 18 March was not sustainable. If we truly want to stop unmanaged and irregular migration flows, we have to offer a genuine and safe alternative through resettlement.

Let me also draw your attention to the fact that the Statement explicitly underlines that all arrivals in the Greek islands will be duly registered and that any application for asylum will be processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, and in cooperation with UNHCR. It also states that returns will take place in full accordance with EU and international law, thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion, and that all migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant international standards and in respect of the principle of *non-refoulement*. There will be no blanket returns.

Turkish authorities, on their side, have guaranteed that all persons returned from Greece will be either automatically granted international protection (in the case of Syrians), or will otherwise have access to procedures to obtain international protection. Furthermore, Turkey has adopted measures to ensure that all applicants and beneficiaries of international protection will have access not only to social services, but also to work permits. Only irregular migrants found not to be in need of international protection will be returned to their countries of origin.

In addition to that, the Turkish authorities and the EU have increased their financial efforts to ensure that the initiatives foreseen by the Statement are realised and to ensure that the best possible assistance is available to refugees and migrants in Turkey, Greece and across EU and Western Balkan first countries of arrival. As regards Turkey, under the Facility for Refugees, the EU has provided 22 million meals, Arabic lessons to 300,000 refugee children, paid 5000 Syrian volunteer teachers and offered 1500 scholarships to Syrian students.

As outlined in the Commission's second report on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of 15 June<sup>2</sup>, the Statement has started to deliver results in spite of many challenges. The third report of 28 September reaffirmed that despite challenging circumstances, implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement has continued to deepen and to accelerate. The sharp decrease in the number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers crossing from Turkey into Greece is proof of the Statement's effectiveness and that the business model of smugglers can be broken. The clear message to migrants is that getting on a boat in Turkey, and endangering lives in the process, is not worth the risk given that there is a legal and safe pathway through resettlement. Most importantly, since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, the number of lives lost in the Aegean Sea has come down markedly.

In parallel, resettlement operations are also taking place. Under the 1:1 framework agreed in the EU-Turkey Statement, over 1500 Syrian refugees have already been transferred from Turkey to EU Member States, with more resettlements due to take place soon. As announced in the Fourth Relocation and Resettlement report<sup>3</sup>, the Commission keeps urging Member States to deliver on both resettlements from Turkey as well as on relocation from Greece and Italy.

In all of these measures and endeavours the role of the civil society and non-governmental organisations is essential. The continued successful implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement depends mainly on the political determination of all sides to take the necessary actions. The EU will uphold its part of the Statement and will continue to encourage its implementation by all of its relevant actors, in line with their respective responsibilities. We will also continue to insist on

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<sup>2</sup> COM(2016) 349 final

the full respect of the rights of migrants and refugees, including adherence to EU and international law.

Yours faithfully,



Blanca RODRIGUEZ GALINDO

Head of Unit