

EU-Turkey: sharing cynicism

Four years ago, on 18 March 2016, as the "EU/Turkey" Statement was made public, the European Union (EU) and Turkey embarked on a "dirty deal". In exchange for a hypothetical relocation to European countries of Syrian refugees present on Turkish land, Turkey was to "host" people who had been sent back from Greek hotspots after an asylum application deemed unfounded or for whom Turkey was considered a safe third country. Turkey also had to stop migrants in its territory from travelling to the EU.

At that time, no one among the EU authorities or among the governments of the member states was fooled. They were all well aware of the cynicism of their Turkish interlocutor. Cynicism, moreover, was well shared. Both sides were enjoying the benefits, while at the same time making the migrants the instrument of their negotiations.

Four years later, this arrangement has revealed all its shortcomings: the hotspots have never stopped being congested, leaving thousands of people living in degrading and inhuman conditions. As the war in Syria rages on and still displaces hundreds of thousands of people, the Turkish President has carried out the threat repeatedly brandished. He announced at the end of February 2020 that he would not be anymore the "gendarme" of part of the EU's external borders. The response of Greece, the member states and the EU was not long in coming: supposedly outraged, they did not hesitate to implement, in the name of the protection of European borders, illegal and brutal measures in violation of the rights of migrants. At the beginning of March, Greece suspended the registration of asylum applications in order to better push back those who would try to enter via Turkey¹ ; a few days later, more than 400 people who had arrived by sea were sequestered in a military vessel moored in the port of Mytilene, on the Greek island of Lesbos², without any decision having been notified to them ; at the same time, Greece had to deny the existence of secret - or "extrajudicial" - pre-removal detention centres at its border with Turkey³. The height of cynicism: the International Organization for Migration (IOM), encouraged and financed by the EU, has moved to the Greek-Turkish border to offer so-called 'voluntary' return assistance to the migrants present there.

The consensus that can often be lacking within the EU in the development of a common immigration and asylum policy seems to have been found: the closure of the Greek-Turkish border and the protection of EU borders at all costs. No need to reinforce more the calls for hatred, racism and xenophobia by local militias⁴. Because the EU, so predictable, only finds an answer to migration by externalising the control of its borders, Erdogan's authoritarian regime is strengthened⁵. Turkey's calculations have paid off.

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¹ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/250097/article/ekathimerini/news/greece-freezes-asylum-applications-from-illegally-entering-migrants>

² <https://www.infomigrants.net/fr/post/23405/fabrice-congolais-a-bord-du-navire-bloque-a-lesbos-on-est-traites-commme-des-animaux>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/world/europe/greece-migrants-secret-site.html>

⁴ <http://cadtm.org/Un-nuage-neo-fasciste-plane-au-dessus-des-frontieres-entre-la-Grece-et-la>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/greece-hopes-eu-turkey-talks-will-ease-tension-over-refugee-crisis>