



Relations of Turkey and EU in the Context of Readmission Agreement and Refugee Crisis

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Keywords

Syria, Refugee, Readmission Agreement, European Union, Arab Spring.

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the policies implemented by Turkey regarding the Syrian refugees who took refuge in Turkey as from April 2011 following the Syrian crisis. In this context, the consequences of "Readmission Agreement" executed in between EU and Turkey which has a significant place in refugee crisis will be scrutinized. Also the details of the chaos caused by the refugees whose number is increasing day by day will be analyzed.

In 2010, Middle East countries such as Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon and Tunisia -in the first place- entered a period in which public meetings, protests, demonstrations, conflicts and civil wars against the regime occurred. It was called as Arab Spring, and the leap of this condition to Turkey's neighbor Syria did not take long. In 2011, following the revolts against regime which started with the demand of freedom, democracy and innovation, the tension between Assad's management and public increased. Ultimately, a civil war which cost thousands of people's lives and left tens of thousands of people stateless has started. In the period following these incidents, Turkey has faced intense migration, and in a short while, it has entered a period which necessitates extremely critical decisions concerning more than one public policy field. Due to this intense migration, Turkey has had to face many problems within the country.

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1. Introduction

Along the history of humanity, individual or mass migrations have occurred, and these migrations have significantly affected and shaped the distribution of population, and social, cultural, economic and political structures in the world. While the people were migrating due to natural causes such as poor living conditions, compelling elements of nature or disasters centuries ago, today it is being observed that this condition has changed, and that the people are migrating in masses due to "unnatural" reasons such as war, terror, violence, hunger and unemployment rather than natural conditions.

In this context, an example of migrations arising from "unnatural" reasons is Syrian citizens migrating to neighboring countries in intense masses due to chaos and civil war occurring in Syria in recent years. Syrians, who have had to change place also within their country, have had to become "refugees" as migrating to neighboring countries and mostly to Turkey. The definition of the concept of "refugee" being referred in here may be made as "an individual who suffer oppression due to various social, economic, cultural, religious or political reasons

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within her/his homeland, or who is worried that s/he will suffer the same in the future, and who leaves her/his homeland for such reasons and who take refuge in other countries, who cannot or does not want to return to her/his homeland". In the study, the word "refugee" is being used as referring to the legal dimension of Syrian refugees. Yet, the Syrian refugees still do not have "refugee" rights legally in our country, and this issue will be addressed in the next section.

Another reason why the agenda of Turkey, which is always open to migrations due to its geopolitical position, is full of the refugee issue along history is the political instability of neighboring countries. The origin of refugee issue that Turkey is encountering in the recent period is based on demonstrations, protests and revolts which started in 2010 in Middle East countries against one man and authoritarian management, and which were performed by Arabic publics in pursuit of freedom and rights. The public had revolted against authoritarian and oppressive regime, and armed conflicts had been observed in some of the referred Middle East countries following demonstrations and meetings realized for democratic rights and freedoms, reform movements and equal income distribution. The migration occurring in Syria may be defined as follows with all its dimensions:

"The movement of migration arising due to the civil war in Syria is a "political" movement as of its reason, "mass" movement as of its form, "compulsory" movement as of its conditions (a large part of a population of 22.5 millions is under danger, and four million people had to leave their residence), and "external migration" movement as of geographical borders (as per UN, the replacement and settlement movement realized in a period of more than a year is being deemed as external migration)". (Tunc, 2015; 37)

On the other hand, "it is being deemed that the Arabic awakening process had showed up by the demonstration marches which had started on December 17, 2010 in Tunisia following self-immolation of Muhammed El Buazizi who was a university graduate peddler". (Sandikli and Semin, 2012; 193) As the result of demonstrations which had started in Tunisia, and as the result of increasing voices upon this incident which is being deemed as the first spark, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had to leave his office. These incidents, which had started in Tunisia, had spread in a short while to Middle East countries such as Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Oman and Lebanon, and had caused change of power in Egypt, Libya and Yemen as Tunisia being in the first place. And in other countries, the power domains had tried to soothe the incidents and revolts and to prevent the rise of bigger chaos by fulfilling the demands of public at a specific rate. According to this;

"The process, that is mostly being named as 'Arab Spring' as it is being assessed as a positive development in the direction of democratization, had gave rise to dynamics in Middle East which would cause an unstable period." (Sandikli and Semin, 2012; 194)

In the region where new power holders had arisen, the political order became open to the control and effect of external powers. The Arab Spring that affected Egypt and Tunisia relatively softer came to a complete deadlock in Syria, and settled on a slippery ground whose future is uncertain. In March 2011, the

reaction of power against the public who revolted with the demands of democratic rights and freedom against the Assad's regime turned to an armed struggle in a short while, and then the public had continued the demonstrations through armed struggle. While the Bashar al-Assad's management had resorted to the use of force against the public with no hesitation, the incidents turned to a civil war costing lives of thousands of people, and causing hundreds of thousands of people to leave their homeland. Due to increasing violence, oppression and fear, the Syrian citizens had started to migrate to neighboring countries in masses. Syrian refugees who took refuge in Turkey in masses by security reasons pulled Turkey into a very critical problem which was not clearly understood in the beginning. However, it is now compelling Turkey in social, economic, cultural and security fields, and it seems to be solved in the long term.

While the refugee crisis, its reasons and consequences will be examined in the study named "Relations of Turkey and Syria in the Context of Refugee Crisis", the problematic conditions that Turkey have suffered following the refugee rush as well as the policies it is pursuing in order to overcome this problem will be analyzed. Moreover, in the study, the effects of refugees whose number have reached to 6 million on the life quality of Turkish public, and the public's point of view regarding the refugees will be scrutinized.

2. Turkey-EU Relations in the Context of Refugee Issue and Readmission Agreement

In the initial years of war, the issue of Syrian refugees had been deemed by the international organizations, EU and the West as the issue of only Turkey, and Turkey had actually been left alone with this problem. Due to many problems such as progress of Syrian refugees to Europe, increase of their number and security, the West started to understand the significance of the condition and to take steps on this issue. In this section, analysis of the attitude of EU regarding Syrian refugees and of the relations developed in this new period will be made. In this context, it is required to define the Readmission Agreement.

Readmission agreements generally regulate the remanding of individuals, who exist illegally in a country or in a group of countries with definite borders, to the country of origin by means of an agreement executed or to the country where they had transit passed most recently (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of European Union Affairs).

"Readmission Agreement", which came into force on 1st October of 2014 after being signed on 16th December of 2013, is anticipating the remanding of refugees entering Europe over Turkey through illegal means is an important agreement because it was assumed as a significant step in the route of membership. But the statements of EU authorities regarding that this agreement will not positively affect the membership process as well as reawakening issues of human rights, democracy, freedom of expression which are being brought in front of Turkey along the membership process put out the hopes for membership. In the Readmission Agreement, there are three issues being addressed. These are monetary aid for refugees, opening of new phases to Turkey for its EU membership, and visa-free travel.

The EU-Turkey relations that were stopped for a while have again gained momentum in an unexpected manner in the recent periods of year 2015 due to refugee rush EU is encountering. The diplomacy traffic, re-livened by October 2015, has opened a new page in the relations of Turkey and EU, and it has stirred the question of "Is membership on the way?" in the minds of Turkish public. The reason of reminding of this question was coming to the fore of issues such as free movement, employment and residence of Turkish citizens in the borders of EU even if the subject of meetings that have started in this new period is mainly the crisis of Syrian refugees. On the other hand, the subject that EU has concentrated on by the Readmission Agreement has not been the free movement of Turkish citizens, but keeping the Syrian refugees far from its borders. EU, which had announced to international public that it does not want migrants on its borders by asserting humanitarian values, is deeming the Readmission Agreement as a political tool in order to avoid the increasingly impaired economy of Europe, and the security problem that has arisen along with the increase of refugee number wishing to enter Europe. In other words, EU, which is always emphasizing humanitarian values on the issues of full membership of Turkey and of the refugee problem, is actually intending to secure its borders and to protect its socio-economic structure.

EU is so much against the refugees and migrants within its borders that it is trying to solve the problem without assuming responsibility on the refugees issue which is actually a global problem through guaranteeing Turkey an aid of 3 billion Euros in case it does not send the Syrian refugees to EU. While signing this agreement, EU prioritized its own interests, and thus it did not consider what a big burden the other party of the agreement is undertaking and what kind of risks it is carrying. By the execution of this agreement in between EU and Turkey, it is being understood that EU will not be able to deal with the Syrian refugees who are heading towards Europe and especially towards Germany as fleeing from the Assad's regime. The attitude of EU in the refugees issue is in the manner of "keep the refugees away from us, and let us provide you ease in the membership process". EU is trying to tell Turkey that "let us not give you full membership, but establish the partnership" whose foundation was laid in 1959 and which was confirmed by the Ankara Agreement, and in other words it is presenting "Exclusive Partnership" (Ercan, 2016; 9).

3. Risks of Readmission Agreement in terms of Turkey

It is being anticipated that this agreement, which is serving only to the interests of EU, is carrying some risks for the contracting state Turkey. While no significant development occurred especially in between 2006-2015, the fast progress of meetings and negotiations following rush of refugees to EU borders are a clear evidence of how much EU is against the migrants within its own borders. While it was being planned for the Readmission Agreement to come into force three years after its acceptance, EU made the date determined as October 1, 2014 by making some commitments, and made irresistible offers for Turkey. What kind of risks do the Readmission Agreement, which is serving the interests of EU in its current form, carry for Turkey?

The first difficulty that Turkey faced is the fact that all EU members are not included in the same criteria. "It is being intended to remand to Turkey within the frame of determined terms the individuals entering EU through illegal means, or Turkish citizens who became unable to meet the required conditions afterwards, or citizens of third countries passing to EU over Turkey. In the same manner, it will be ensured for the individuals who had illegally entered Turkey over Europe to be remanded to EU within the frame of the signed agreement. But the agreement executed among the parties is not binding England, Ireland and Denmark. It is because some privileges have been provided to these countries. (Ercan, 2016; 13) In this case, Turkey has to make agreements with each of England (was still a member of the union on the date of signing of the agreement), Ireland and Denmark for this agreement to be valid.

Another issue is that within the scope of the agreement the migrants entering EU through illegal means will be remanded to Turkey in case they declare that they were coming from Turkey as the country of origin no matter they are actually coming from. Majority of the ones migrating to EU are from Middle Eastern and African countries. Everyone, specifying that they had used Turkey for transit pass no matter what their ethnical origin is, to be remanded to Turkey will wherret Turkey in many aspects. The migrants, illegally staying in EU, had left their countries due to reasons such as poverty, war and terror. They would prefer to be remanded to Turkey instead of being remanded to their own countries. In this case, thousands of people illegally existing at the borders of EU will be remanded to Turkey, and it will bring the country to a deadlock in terms of economy, employment and security. Even if it had been specified that the country determined as transit pass country would be searched and verified, it is clear that it is extremely difficult in practice.

Another risk of Readmission Agreement is also relevant to Turkish migrants in Europe. The applications of Turkish citizens demanding shelter or migration in Europe due to various reasons will be easily refused. In addition, it will be in subject for the migrants who are residing in EU states for years to be remanded to Turkey by putting them in the condition of "being unable to meet the required conditions" in accordance with the scope of the agreement.

On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that EU, which will get one refugee against each refugee being remanded to Turkey within the scope of agreement, has 28 member states. In other words, while Turkey, in the position of 1 against 28, will be suffering the burden of accepted refugees, EU is facilitating the fusion of refugees within the society by sharing the few number of refugees among 28 states. Also it will not come across any material problem by dividing the economic burden of refugees to 28 states.

When the referred reasons are considered, it is clearly being observed that the Readmission Agreement is carrying significant risk in respect of Turkey. Turkey, with the objective of entering EU, should establish a balance in the policy of assisting Syrian refugees, and should prioritize the interests of the country.

4. Conclusion

Turkey, which has implemented “Open Door Policy” without making discrimination of language, religion, sect and race against the Syrian refugees since the entry of first Syrian refugee group in April 2011, has applied its policies considering for a long while that the civil war in Syria –and thus the refugees in Turkey- is temporary. But Turkey, which understood that the condition is not temporary along with the deepening of civil war and the increase of refugee rush, has directed to find more lasting solutions for the refugees issue.

International organizations and EU, which deemed the refugees issue as the problem of only Turkey in the beginning, understood the seriousness of subject along with the start of migration of large Syrian refugee groups to Europe in 2015. They put the Readmission Agreement in force by using the EU membership process of Turkey as a trump. Under the agreement, EU clearly showed that it does not want migrants at its borders by making concessions to Turkey that it had never provided before. When the relations in between Turkey and EU -that is completely using the material support –which may be qualified as political bribe-, EU membership and free movement of Turkish citizens as a trump- had not progressed as planned, showdowns have started.

It is clearly being observed that EU is approaching the refugees issue not in humanitarian and social respect, but in economic and security respect. And Turkey showed that its perspective of refugees issue was not actually much different from EU’s perspective when it used the refugees, whom Turkey had accepted by humane feeling without any hesitation in the initial years of civil war, for threatening EU with opening the borders and letting the refugees into Europe if it could not get the support that it expected from EU in the recent period. And even then, it had informed that it had closed the EU page, and gave a green light to Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Turkish citizens, who accepted the receipt of Syrian refugees as positive in the initial years of war, do not see the Syrian refugees positive anymore due to problems which had arisen in the five year period regarding socio-culture, economy, education, health and security.

Turkey, which has applied “Open Door Policy” since the initial years, has started to suffer under this problem as the number of Syrian refugees increased. Turkey, which has to generate robust and lasting solutions in public sphere in a short while, is required not to aggrieve Turkish citizens during the implementation phase of these policies. Turkish government should primarily consider the interests and life quality of Turkish citizens, should prevent possible injustices, and should develop solution suggestions which will eliminate the existing injustices.

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