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Turkey and the European Union

Bargaining, but for what?

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV494 - March 2016 -

Publication date: Wednesday 16 March 2016

After intense and prolonged negotiations and bargaining, the European Union and Turkey reached an agreement on 7th March in Brussels on a solution to cope with the refugee "crisis" and massive influx of Syrians into European countries. As far as we know, Turkey asked for another 3 billion euros in return for controlling the Aegean Sea traffic and the flow of the refugees into Europe and to accept all refugees back from Europe. According to the negotiations, Europe will be having one Syrian refugee for every refugee it sends back to Turkey.

We can only imagine the optimistic ideas European Union leaders have in their minds. They may be thinking that they can contain all refugees in Turkey and they can choose the most "acceptable ones" among the Syrian population. But it is not very difficult to foresee that illegal refugee flow from Turkey to European countries will continue. Turkey's closed door policy at the Syrian border since May 2015 has not stopped Syrians from moving. And since they know that they have no future in Turkey, where they do not even have a refugee status (yes, their legal status in Turkey is "temporary asylum seekers", in other words, we call Syrians "guests" as if they have a home to go back) they all want to go to Europe, where they think they can have jobs, houses, at least a legal status. Closing the borders, increasing the border security controls or appointing Turkey as the border police will not prevent the people from coming, this will only make their route more expensive, more dangerous - often deadly - and more vulnerable to human traffickers.

As for the Turkish side of the bargaining, since long before the Brussels meetings, not only the Turkish prime minister Davuto?lu and the cabinet, but also the proponent media (which include almost all the newspapers and TV channels in Turkey except for a couple of independent ones who are struggling to survive) have been making an enormous effort to convince the public opinion: That they're doing what's best for the refugees, that they're doing what's best for the Turkish society, and that things are going really great with the European Union.

First of all, it's more than fair to accept that this summit was not about improving the living standards of more than 2,5 million refugees in Turkey and almost 1 million refugees who have crossed to Europe so far; it was about solving the refugee crisis of Europe in return for some "compromises" that might be given to Turkey. Secondly, yes, Turkey pursued an open door policy for a long time and accepted a huge part of Syrian population. But despite the new migration law which was passed in 2014, it's crystal clear that Turkey does not have any permanent migration policy whatsoever. Neither Syrians nor other migrant groups feel secure, most of them work unregistered under terrible conditions and with unimaginably low salaries, there's an enormous housing problem (only 10 % of the refugees live in the camps), school enrollment is very low among children and youth, there's no gender perspective in the existing "mechanism", so on and so forth. And about the expectations on the Turkish side; travelling Europe without visa, improving the relations with the European Union, taking steps in the EU membership negotiations? Please…

What the rulers do best is to create an atmosphere of fear and give us false hopes about a brighter future. So, why don't we, as people, start touching each other, start having a meaningful dialogue instead? Why don't we start with the human rights violations in Turkey, the situation of minorities, women, LGBTI population, migrants, the attacks against Kurdish cities, corruptions, lack of justice? How about the 3rd bomb explosion in the very capital of Turkey only 2 days ago? How about rising xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe, how about rising nationalism and conservatism in Turkey? How about creating the channels of solidarity and putting pressure over the ones who are responsible for this mess in the first place?