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# RETHINKING IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN TURKEY: SOME DEMO-ECONOMIC REFLECTIONS

*Ahmet İçduygu*

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**CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2008/72**

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**Irregular Migration Series**

*Demographic and Economic Module*

Cooperation project on the social integration  
of immigrants, migration, and the movement  
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**CARIM**  
**Euro-Mediterranean Consortium**  
**for Applied Research on International Migration**

**Analytic and Synthetic Notes – Irregular Migration Series**  
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**Rethinking irregular migration in Turkey:**  
**Some Demo-Economic Reflections**

Ahmet İçduygu

Migration Research Program (MiReKoc), Koç University

This publication is part of a series of papers on the theme of Irregular Migration written in the framework of the CARIM project and presented at a meeting organised by CARIM in Florence: "Irregular Migration into and through Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries" (6 - 8 July 2008).

These papers will also be discussed in another meeting between Policy Makers and Experts on the same topic (25 - 27 January 2009). The results of these discussions will be published separately. The entire set of papers on Irregular Migration are available at the following address: <http://www.carim.org/ql/IrregularMigration>.

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European University Institute  
Badia Fiesolana  
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)  
Italy

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The Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) was created in February 2004 and has been financed by the European Commission. Until January 2007, it referred to part C - “*cooperation related to the social integration of immigrants issue, migration and free circulation of persons*” of the MEDA programme, i.e. the main financial instrument of the European Union to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Since February 2007, CARIM has been funded as part of the AENEAS programme for technical and financial assistance to third countries in the areas of migration and asylum. The latter programme establishes a link between the external objectives of the European Union’s migration policy and its development policy. AENEAS aims at providing third countries with the assistance necessary to achieve, at different levels, a better management of migrant flows.

Within this framework, CARIM aims, in an academic perspective, to observe, analyse, and predict migration in the North African and the Eastern Mediterranean Region (hereafter Region).

CARIM is composed of a coordinating unit established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) of the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), and a network of scientific correspondents based in the 12 countries observed by CARIM: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and, since February 2007, also Libya and Mauritania. All are studied as origin, transit and immigration countries. External experts from the European Union and countries of the Region also contribute to CARIM activities.

The CARIM carries out the following activities:

- Mediterranean migration database;
- Research and publications;
- Meetings of academics;
- Meetings between experts and policy makers;
- Early warning system.

The activities of CARIM cover three aspects of international migration in the Region: economic and demographic, legal, and socio-political.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: [www.carim.org](http://www.carim.org)

*For more information:*

Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (EUI)

Villa Malafrasca

Via Boccaccio, 151

50133 Firenze (FI)

Italy

Tel: +39 055 46 85 878

Fax: + 39 055 46 85 755

Email: [carim@eui.eu](mailto:carim@eui.eu)

**Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies**

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/>

## **Abstract**

At the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe, Turkey faces irregular migration flows, both as a country of destination and of transit: the irregular migration flows to the country consist mainly of transit migrants, clandestine immigrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees.

In the last decade, the major migration flows into Turkey have come from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, while significant numbers have also arrived from Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Georgia. Migrants from the former countries are mainly transients heading for Europe or other more developed parts of the world. They stay in Turkey only on a temporary basis. Migrants from the latter group of countries are foreign nationals who intend to work illegally in Turkey, for a limited period of time.

Turkey's position over the 1951 Geneva Convention, excluding non-European asylum seekers, further complicates the situation as non-Europeans account for the majority of asylum seekers in Turkey. Another feature of migration to Turkey is the national diversity of the immigrants: authorities in Turkey have identified 163 nationalities that have arrived in the country in the last decade.

Clearly, Turkey has become a country with multiple roles in irregular migratory movements. Utilising a relatively revealing data set on the apprehending of irregular migrants provided by the security forces together with the findings of several surveys conducted in the country, this paper, first, documents the irregular migration experience in Turkey over the last 30 years. It also relates the phenomenon of irregular migration in Turkey to the wider context of European international migratory regimes. Then the paper outlines the developments associated with irregular migration in the country. The role of Turkey's EU affairs within these changes is complex and contradictory, and not yet fully explored.

After describing irregular migration, the paper explores, finally, the way in which the political construction of irregular migration is associated with the securitisation and economisation of international migratory regimes in Europe and around its peripheries.

## **Résumé**

Considérant sa position géographique à la croisée des chemins entre l'Asie, l'Europe et l'Afrique, la Turquie reçoit des flux de migration irrégulière aussi bien comme pays d'immigration que de transit. Les acteurs des flux de migration irrégulière vers la Turquie sont essentiellement des migrants en transit, des travailleurs immigrants clandestins et des demandeurs d'asile et réfugiés.

Pendant la dernière décennie, la majorité des flux migratoire vers la Turquie étaient originaires de l'Irak, l'Iran, l'Afghanistan, le Pakistan et le Bangladesh. Au même temps, des nombres assez significatifs sont arrivés aussi de la Moldavie, la Roumanie, l'Ukraine, la Fédération de Russie et la Géorgie. Les migrants originaires du premier groupe de pays sont surtout des personnes de passage se dirigeant vers l'Europe ou d'autres zones plus développées du monde. Ils restent seulement sur une base temporaire en Turquie. Tandis que les migrants issus du second groupe de pays sont des étrangers qui aspirent à travailler illégalement en Turquie, en général, pour une durée du temps limitée.

La position de la Turquie sur la convention de Genève de 1951, abstraction faite des demandeurs d'asile non-Européens, complique davantage la situation étant donné que les non-Européens constituent la majorité des demandeurs d'asile en Turquie. Une autre particularité de la migration en Turquie est la diversité nationale des immigrants : les autorités turques ont identifié 163 nationalités arrivées dans le pays pendant la dernière décennie. Clairement, la Turquie est devenue un pays avec de multiples rôles dans les mouvements migratoires irréguliers. En s'appuyant sur un ensemble de données, assez révélatrices, sur les cas d'appréhension de migrants irréguliers, fournis par les forces de sécurité, en parallèle avec les conclusions de plusieurs enquêtes conduites dans le pays, ce papier documente en premier lieu l'expérience de migration irrégulière de la Turquie pendant les dernières 30

années. Il rattache aussi le phénomène de migration irrégulière en Turquie au contexte plus large des régimes de migration internationale en Europe.

Ensuite, le papier expose les développements et les mutations associés à la migration irrégulière dans le pays. Le rôle des affaires UE de la Turquie dans le contexte de ces changements est complexe et contradictoire, même si il n'est pas encore complètement exploré. Après avoir décrit le panorama de la migration irrégulière, le papier explore la voie selon laquelle la construction politique de la migration irrégulière est associée au processus de sécurisation et d'économisation des régimes migratoires internationaux en Europe et ses périphéries.



## Introduction

At the heart of debate over the phenomenon of irregular migration, there is Europe and its hinterland. Discussions of irregular migration to Europe and those hinterlands are not simply descriptions of an existing reality, but are, to some extent, part of the construction of that reality whereby discursive practices enable such an entity to be conceptualized and talked about in policy statements.<sup>1</sup> This does not, of course, mean that we need to discard conventional analytical and empirical frameworks which tackle the reality of irregular migration. Rather, in order to have a more informed view of this ‘reality’, we need to work with theoretical abstractions and discursive de-constructions: that is, we should take a multi-dimensional analytical approach to the study of irregular migration. At the core of these theoretical and discursive ideas are *two interrelated features of the recent politicisation of international migration system in Europe: economisation and securitisation*. The political construction of irregular migration in the European sphere can be interpreted through the economisation and securitisation of international migratory regimes in the continent, which not only are becoming increasingly more restrictive and selective, but also more dynamic and multifaceted. This means that these regimes are often shaped by a complex, interacting, and even conflicting mixture of economic interests (economisation) and security concerns (securitisation) in the migratory regimes of major receiving countries. It is within this context that, for instance, international migratory flows directed towards European countries include a significant proportion of irregular migrants from the peripheries of Europe, either those who “illegally cross the borders” or those who “legally arrive in the countries but overstay after their visas are expired” or “do work in those countries though they do not have work permits”. Turkey appears as one of those outer areas of Europe in which the phenomenon of irregular migration has become an issue of concern not only for the country itself but also for the continent as a whole.

Since the mid-1990s, much has been written about irregular migration in Turkey. Increasingly, too, the implications of irregular migration for Turkey’s European Union (EU) membership are being studied. Turkey has, in recent years, implemented a number of policy changes in its migratory regimes that have been influenced by the dynamics and mechanisms of the Turkey-EU relationship. Utilising a relatively revealing data set on the apprehending of irregular migrants provided by the security forces, together with the findings of several surveys conducted in the country this paper, first, documents the irregular migration experience of Turkey in the last 30 years. It also relates irregular migration in Turkey to the wider context of European international migratory regimes. Then the paper outlines the developments associated with irregular migration in the country. The role of Turkey’s EU aspirations within these changes is complex and contradictory, and not yet fully explored. After describing the panorama of irregular migration the paper finally explores the way in which the political construction of irregular migration is associated with the securitisation and the economisation of international migratory regimes in Europe and its hinterlands.

## Irregular Migration in Turkey: Reality, Concepts, and Methods of Measurement

Turkey has long been defined as a “country of emigration” because of the migration of workers to West European countries since the early 1960s. But migratory movements towards the country in recent years has meant that Turkey has become a “country of immigration” as well.<sup>2</sup> In fact, migratory flows towards Turkey are not a new phenomenon; in truth, immigration to the country has existed since the early years of the Republic. However, migratory practices in these early periods followed a

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<sup>1</sup> See Düvell (2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

<sup>2</sup> See İcduygu (2003, 2006).



substantially different course from the migratory practices of recent times, both in terms of nature and scale. International migratory movements towards Turkey during the nation-state building phase concerned migrants with Turkish ethnicity, living in neighbouring countries.

Turkey has seen, in recent years, in dramatic contrast to the early years of the Republic, flows of migrant groups from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, migrating for various purposes. Ongoing immigration to Turkey of “*aliens*” altered Turkey’s position in the international migration system in Europe and, in a sense, Turkey’s reputation as a “migrant-sending country” is now coupled with its reputation as a “migrant-receiving country.” More recently, Turkey has also become a transit country (transit zone) for irregular migrants seeking to reach a third country. In this context, it may be best to speak not of a dual but of a triadic position for the country. International migration movements to Turkey, since the late 1970s, has included a great variety of transit migrants, irregular migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees particularly from neighbouring countries.<sup>3</sup> Migration towards Turkey is not restricted to these migrant groups. Globalisation and liberal developments in the economy have meant that it is now common to see foreign nationals find jobs in their fields or residence permits for in Turkey: pensioners (“retirement migration”) have come to Turkey to retire on the country’s Mediterranean coasts.

These migratory movements are closely related to Turkey’s geography, and also to the recent history of the region. Economic, political and security questions arising in neighbouring countries are among the reasons that drive people living in those countries to migrate to Turkey. While some see Turkey as their destination country, others consider it only as a stepping stone on their way to other targeted destinations in the developed countries of the West and North. Due to Turkey’s position as a bridge connecting Asia, Europe and Africa and its important sea routes, many irregular migrants tend to use Turkey as a transit country.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and regime change in Iran in the 1970s, the legal turmoil and wars in the Middle East caused by Saddam’s regime in Iraq, and finally the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union caused Turkey to emerge as an important destination for irregular migratory movements. As with many other countries, the intensity of globalisation in this era contributed to Turkey becoming a “migrant-receiving country” and a “transit country” in its international migration system which to a large extent is an integral part of the European migratory regime. This created a complex migration system in Turkey, involving irregular migrants, transit migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and persons of regular (legal) migrant status.

We will examine the above-described patterns of migration into Turkey under two headings: irregular (undocumented) migration and regular (documented) migration (Table 1). Irregular migration can be further discussed under three separate headings: (a) transit migration, (b) shuttle, or circular, migration, and (c) asylum seeker and refugee movements. Regular migration, on the other hand, comprises persons who arrive in Turkey for employment or academic purposes and their family members, who have the necessary permits for residence and work. The discussion here will not specifically include regular migration, since it is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is a formidable task to obtain sufficient and reliable data for determining the volume and trends of irregular migratory movements. Nevertheless, there are some indicative estimates available. For example, it is possible to comment on the extent of *irregular migration* towards Turkey by evaluating figures on persons who had been apprehended by the Turkish security authorities on charges of irregular migration.<sup>4</sup> Such cases substantially accelerated from the mid-1990s to the early years of the

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<sup>3</sup> See İçduygu (2003, 2006), Kirişçi (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Data on apprehended irregular migrants in Turkey since the mid-1990s are compiled by the Bureau for Foreign Nationals, Borders, and Asylum at the Directorate of General Security of the Ministry of the Interior.

first decade of this century. Whereas just over 11,000 irregular migrants were apprehended in 1995, and 19,000 in 1996, this figure reached 47,000 in 1999, and by 2000 it was over 94,000 (Table 1). Starting in 2001, a declining trend is observed in the number of irregular migrants detained: this figure, which was nearly 83,000 in 2002, dropped below 50,000 in the year 2005, but again rose to nearly 52,000 in 2006 (Table 1). When it is considered that these figures represent only apprehended irregular migrants, it is clear that the scale of irregular migration through Turkey must be greater. In reference to the relevant literature on migration, it is only fair to say that the true picture would be at least two or three times the number of migrants apprehended. When the magnitude of a figure so calculated is taken into account, it can be stated that the scale of the irregular migratory wave Turkey has received in recent years is comparable to some of the most sought after destination countries.

When origin countries for irregular migrants are considered, it can be argued that some of the apprehended migrants, mostly coming from the Eastern and Southern borders of Turkey, have intended to choose the country as a bridge to reach their destination countries in the West and North, so they were most likely *transit migrants*.<sup>5</sup> Considering the data available on migrants detained by the security forces, it can be assumed<sup>6</sup> that in the first years of this century, around 51,000 to 57,000 migrants intended to use Turkey as a transit country every year, while, today, this figure has dropped to below 20,000. Most of these transit migrants enter Turkey illegally with the help of human smugglers and leave or attempt to leave Turkey using smugglers again. From 1996 to 2006, nearly 620,000 irregular migrants were apprehended in Turkey, nearly 52 per cent of them who seemed to be transit migrants (Table 1). Over this period, the first five source countries of migrants, who were mostly transit migrants, were: Iraq (114,000), Pakistan (51,000), Afghanistan (38,000), Iran (25,000), and Bangladesh (20,000) (Table 2).

A new source of data is the information released by the Turkish General Staff<sup>7</sup> on irregular border-crossings since September 2006. This source provides us with figures which implicitly reflect the nature of irregular migration through Turkey. This new information on irregular border-crossings is complementary to the data on apprehended irregular migrants elaborated above. According to this data set, there were approximately 48,000 foreign citizens apprehended in the period of September 2006 - February 2007 as they violated the rules of border-crossings in Turkey: more than one-fifth were from Palestine, less than one-fifth from Iraq, more than 10 per cent from Afghanistan, another 10 per cent from Mauritania, nine per cent from Pakistan, and seven per cent from Somalia (Table 3). Data indicated that nearly four-fifths of these irregular border-crosser were caught on the borders between Greece and Turkey, and Bulgaria and Turkey while migrants were attempting to leave Turkey, and the remaining one-fifth were apprehended on the eastern borders of Turkey (mostly on Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian borders) while these migrants were attempting to enter the country (Table 4).

By shuttle, or circular, migration, we refer to persons making multiple trips to Turkey in search of economic opportunities. In circular migration, entry into Turkey is typically legal, but visas may be overstayed or the migrant may engage in circular movements in order to avoid overstaying their visa. One important mode of shuttle migration is *suitcase trade* (or shuttle trade), in which persons are less

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<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed later in this paper, there is evidence that many irregular migrants are transit migrants who come to Turkey with the intention of going to a third country, but who remain there and, yet, continue with the idea that they are in transit.

<sup>6</sup> Here we assume that all apprehended migrants from some countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan are transit migrants, and that all apprehended migrants from some other countries such as Moldova, Ukraine or the Russian Federation are circular migrants.

<sup>7</sup> Information on these irregular border-crossings was compiled by the General Command of Gendarmerie and the Coast Guard Command.

likely to stay in Turkey beyond the duration of their visas. Another significant example are those who come to Turkey in search of informal jobs, in which case visa violations are more likely, but also depend on Turkey's visa regime for a particular country as well as the proximity of that country to Turkey. The reason that we consider both *suitcase trade* and labour migration as forms of circular migration is because, conceptually and empirically, there are a number of similarities between these forms of cross-border mobility. First, the economic activities of both the *suitcase traders* and irregular labour migrants are largely informal. Second, these two forms of circular migration are often intermingled with each other: *suitcase traders* may turn into labour migrants, or vice versa, labour migrants may sometimes engage in cross-border trade.<sup>8</sup> Third, states on both sides seek to curb circular migration through restrictive measures, with the result that corruption at the borders and in law enforcement increases.<sup>9</sup> Fourth, both *suitcase trade* and irregular labour migration often operate through cross-border social networks and using linguistic and ethnic ties.<sup>10</sup> And finally, both types of circular migration are characterised by the prevalence of women, a result of their unfavourable position in post-Soviet labour markets.

As a part of an irregular circular migratory movement, *suitcase trade* is motivated by the demand for and supply of various merchandise where the costs – including taxes, tariffs and transportation – are significantly different between origin and destination countries. *Suitcase trade* to Istanbul from the Maghreb and Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland and later Bulgaria) started in the late 1980s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concomitant removal of travel restrictions, entries by *suitcase traders* from former Soviet Union (FSU) countries skyrocketed.<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to estimate the number of *suitcase traders*; however, figures on entries from post-Soviet countries through the 1990s give us an approximate idea, although these figures also include tourists and other travellers.<sup>12</sup> *Irregular circular labour migrants* are those from the poorer republics of the Community of Independent States (CIS), as well as some Balkan countries, who arrive in Turkey on tourist visas to work informally in domestic service, the entertainment sector, the sex industry, garment workshops, construction, tourism and agriculture. Based on some case studies on specific groups or sectors, it is possible to say that the majority among these are women, and hail from places such as Romania, Bulgaria,<sup>13</sup> Gagauzia,<sup>14</sup> Moldova, the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Turkmenistan. Whereas women most typically find employment as domestic labourers, men are more likely to work in construction<sup>15</sup> and agricultural.

<sup>8</sup> For some indications of this intermingling in the case of post-Soviet countries, see Yükeker (2004); in the case of North African suitcase traders, see Daniş (2006) and Perouse (2002), cited in Daniş (2006).

<sup>9</sup> For a conceptual discussion of corruption in relation to state capacity in controlling irregular migration in the case of Moldovan labour migrants in Turkey, see Eder (2007). For a similar discussion in the case of Russian suitcase traders, see Yükeker (2004).

<sup>10</sup> On the social networks weaving through the transnational suitcase trade market, see Yükeker (2003). Regarding ethnic Turkish Bulgarian irregular migration to Turkey, see Parla (2006); on the migration networks of the Turkish-speaking Gagauz and of Moldovans, see Kaşka (2006), Keough (2007) and Ünal (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Although exact figures are unavailable, suitcase trade exports from Turkey to FSU countries were estimated to be around 9 billion dollars in 1996 and fell sharply after the Russian financial crisis in 1998 and have not recovered from a low point of 2 billion dollars per year since the first years of this century, partly as a result of the transformation in trade between Turkey and Russia and other FSU countries. For a detailed account of shuttle trade from the FSU, see Yükeker (2003).

<sup>12</sup> Only 37,087 people entered Turkey from the USSR in 1989, whereas the next year, this figure climbed to 222,537. By the mid-1990s, entries from all Community of Independent States (CIS) countries stood at 1.5 million; and despite a drop down to 1 million in 1999, following the currency crisis in Russia, by 2000 this figure had gone up to 1,380,000. As of 2006, total number of entries from the CIS stands at 3,773,000 (Yükeker, 2003 and TUIK, 2008). Within the CIS, Russia accounted for the largest volume of suitcase trade from Turkey, and the greatest number of shuttle traders (Yükeker, 2003). Accordingly, it also accounts for the largest number of entries from the CIS: 677,152 in 2000 and 1,853,442 in 2006.

<sup>13</sup> On the migration of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria, see Parla, (2007).

<sup>14</sup> On the migration of the Turkish-speaking Gagauz minority, see Keough (2007); on Moldovan migrants, see Ünal (2008).

<sup>15</sup> There is scant evidence for irregular male migrant workers. For a recent study on informal construction workers from

No information on the gender and sectoral breakdown of irregular labour migrants is available.

As in the case of suitcase trade, it is difficult to estimate the number of circular labour migrants. Here, we can only rely on two different types of data to get some idea of the directions and extent of circular labour migration; however, both need to be interpreted with some caution. One source of data is the earlier-mentioned figures on apprehensions by security forces which give us some indication of the movements of irregular circular migrants. Accordingly, the top five source countries for circular irregular migrants were: Moldova (53,000), Romania (23,000), Georgia (18,000), Ukraine (18,000), and Russian Federation (18,000) (Table 2). These figures would suggest that, though the proportion of irregular migrant workers among the total number of apprehended irregular migrants seems to have increased in recent years, their absolute numbers have decreased. Again, according to the same figures, the annual number of such migrants is estimated to have reached 35,000 or 43,000 in the early years of this century, but as of today, this figure has dropped to 24,000 to 33,000 annually.

However, figures for apprehending migrants for visa violations and illegal entries and exits may be misleading in the case of circular labour migrants. Ethnographic evidence on migrant domestic workers indicates that these strategically plan their stays according to the Turkish visa regime and the distance between their respective countries and Turkey. Therefore, the number of times that migrants are apprehended may fall at a time when the number of migrants is increasing. For instance, ethnic Turks from Bulgaria can stay up to three months within a six-month period without a visa requirement; migrant workers would then come back for another three months. In this case, such a migrant would not appear as being apprehended, but would appear several times in the annual figures for “arriving foreign nationals” in Turkish statistics.<sup>16</sup> To give a divergent example, the tourist visa expires after 30 days for citizens of Turkmenistan. Again, ethnographic evidence suggests that they would stay on for a year or more, since a back and forth trip to their country is costly. In this case, a migrant’s exit on an expired visa would appear in the statistics as ‘apprehended’, but probably less frequently than in the case of migrants from a country closer to Turkey.<sup>17</sup>

Another source of data, figures on legal entries to Turkey, gives us some indirect indication on the circular movement of irregular labour migrants. Although these figures obviously also include *bona fide* tourists, students and business people, they may be broadly indicative of a pattern of circular labour migration from the countries mentioned above (see Table 2a). This pattern may be more visible for countries such as Armenia, Georgia and Turkmenistan,<sup>18</sup> whereas the increasing number of visitors from Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Bulgaria must be due to a mixture of tourism, business and labour migration.

In recent years, the Turkish authorities have implemented measures for regulating irregular migration so as to harmonise with the EU: so the penalties for human trafficking and smuggling have been increased, and the issue of protecting borders is now dealt with more seriously. As a preliminary

(Contd.) \_\_\_\_\_

Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Georgia in the construction sector, see Toksöz and Akpınar (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Currently, a 90-day visa exemption applies to Georgia, though previously, Georgian citizens were required to get 15-day tourist visas. In this situation, apprehensions of Georgians for visa violations are likely to fall, while legal entries will continue to increase. For Azerbaijanis, Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians, there is a two-month tourist visa policy.

<sup>17</sup> The illegal entry-exit apprehension figures for Turkmens would likely be smaller than apprehensions of Moldovans, who, according to ethnographic accounts, stay for about six months in Turkey and then leave, the point at which fines [have I altered the meaning here] for visa overstays apply (Keough, 2007; Eder, 2007). In addition to Moldovans (and the Gagauz minority) and Turkmens, Armenian citizens can also get 30-day tourist visas.

<sup>18</sup> Given that standards of living in Armenia, Turkmenistan and Georgia would preclude a significant tourist flow to Turkey’s coastal resorts (unlike in the case of Russia, for instance), these entries may be attributed to increasing labour migration; especially in the Georgian case, the sharp increase (compared to Azerbaijan) following the visa liberalisation is probably indicative of a circular flow.

hypothesis, it may be argued that these measures have, for a number of reasons, been effective in curbing transit migration – as the figures on apprehensions (Table 2) suggest – and less effective in stemming irregular circular labour migration. First, this may be due to the fact that labour migrants most often, unlike many transit migrants, enter Turkey legally. Second, several case studies provide support for this contention, showing that though fines for visa overstays have been increased for CIS countries in recent years, corruption seems to play some role in migrants' efforts to escape apprehension and/or prolong the duration of their stay in Turkey.<sup>19</sup> Third, and related to the second point, labour migrants, especially domestic workers, are less visible in public, making it harder for them to be caught, whereas Turkish police regularly target sex and entertainment workers for deportation.<sup>20</sup> Fourth, while Bulgarians can now freely seek work within the EU and Moldovans and Ukrainians can become legal labour migrants in Russia, irregular labour migration from these countries continues, owing partly to Turkey's proximity and partly to cultural affinities. Fifth, periods of relative economic stagnation<sup>21</sup> and high unemployment in Turkey may have made the Turkish labour and commodity markets less attractive for both *suitcase traders* and some circular labour migrants; however, in the specific case of female domestic labour, the "care crisis," that is, the growing demand for elderly and child care in middle class urban homes continues to be pull factor for migration. Since available sources are not conclusive, further studies need to be conducted to test the validity of these statements.

It is difficult to know to what extent the two forms of irregular migration— both transit and circular – lead to a permanent or semi-permanent stay of immigrants in Turkey, but there is no visible evidence that this proportion is significant: any type of residual immigrant population as a product of these two migratory flows seems to be quite small, probably only five to ten per cent.

As noted earlier, Turkey, as a transit zone between Asia, Europe and Africa, has, since the 1980s, become an important stopping point, or a stepping stone, for many *asylum seekers*. Without a doubt, the political irregularities, problems and turmoil along its periphery makes Turkey's borders all the more open to entries for asylum purposes. The great majority of these asylum seekers are citizens of Iran and Iraq. Actually, this *de facto* situation is not in compliance with the geographical limitation clause that Turkey entered in the UN Geneva Convention of 1951. According to this limitation, Turkey considers asylum applications only from asylum seekers coming from Europe and would not undertake any liability as to asylum seekers from outside Europe.<sup>22</sup> Though such a limitation is in effect, almost all of those who seek asylum in Turkey are non-Europeans. Without a doubt, the geographical limitation clause that Turkey applies makes the asylum regime has led to criticism from the international community and various international agencies. The Turkish authorities though have tended to oppose the abrogation of this limitation clause, concerned that, without such a geographic limitation, Turkey would become a "buffer zone" between Europe and the countries of political

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<sup>19</sup> See, Eder (2007) and Ünal (2008).

<sup>20</sup> On this point, see Kirişçi (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Although the overall performance of the Turkish economy in recent years is relatively better than in the early 2000s, some areas of the economy, such as clothing manufacture, construction, and agriculture, where irregular migrants can find employment opportunities, have been faced with serious production and financial problems.

<sup>22</sup> This is related partly to the refugee problem in post-war Europe and is partly a ramification of the anti-communist policies that Turkey adopted during those years, when Turkey would grant asylum to persons that arrive from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. With her absolute pledge for protection and placement of persons fleeing communist regimes, Turkey undertook to serve a very limited number of asylum seekers. In fact, during the Cold War years, migratory movements in Turkey involving asylum seekers from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were scarce. According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) data, between 1945 and 1991, less than 8,000 asylum applications from the Soviet Union and Eastern European states were filed with Turkish authorities as per Turkey's position under the Geneva Convention of 1951. More than half of these applications was filed between 1979 and 1991 (İçduygu, 2003).

turmoil in the region and that it would be faced with an extensive wave of asylum seekers. It has been stated that such a change would be thinkable only as part of full membership negotiations to the EU. Nevertheless, in practice, this limitation is not applied; asylum seekers from outside Europe are granted temporary asylum, if and when they are granted refugee status, through a joint procedure of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and the Ministry of the Interior, the phase of re-settlement to a third country is initiated.

When we consider the magnitude of migratory waves washing over Turkey in the last twenty five years or more, it becomes clear that asylum seeker and refugee movements do not have a particularly heavy weight quantitatively. Between 1997 and 2007, Turkey received over 30,000 asylum applications (Table 5). When we consider their families as well, this figure climbs to 56,000. The greatest number of asylum applications to Turkey come from Iran and Iraq. 46 percent of these applications are filed by Iranians, 44 percent by Iraqis and the rest by asylum seeking migrants from other countries. In 2000, nearly 4,000 Iranians and over 1,600 Iraqis sought asylum in Turkey.<sup>23</sup> In recent years, however, these figures have declined. Whereas the annual number of asylum seekers towards the end of the 1990s was approximately 6,000, by the mid-2000s, this figure dropped to below 4,000. In 2006, asylum figures were less than 2,300 for Iranians and less than 800 for Iraqis. In 2007, again a notable increase was observed in the number of asylum seekers, in particular with arrivals from Iraq and some African countries: over 4,400 applicants, and the total number of migrants, including their family members, was over 7,600 (Table 5).

In fact, from 1997 to 2007, more than 27,000 of the total 56,000 asylum seekers (more than 48 per cent) were granted refugee status and re-settled in other countries, such that they became “a type of transit migrants”.<sup>24</sup> Currently, while more than 7,000 refugees are waiting for resettlement, another 5,000 asylum seekers are waiting for their status to be determined. This asylum procedure itself makes Turkey a transit country for those people who have been granted refugee status and are waiting for resettlement.

It is also necessary to stress that the movement of asylum seekers and that of irregular migrants often intermingle. In many poor regions of the world, economic collapse, internal wars, ethnic violence and natural disasters (such as famine) have gone hand in hand. But nevertheless, the international refugee regime is still largely based on the definition of individual persecution in the Geneva Convention of 1951 and the 1967 Protocol. Therefore, there is a gap between the reality of forced migration (environmental refugees, economic refugees, etc.) and its definition in legal texts and practices.<sup>25</sup> To begin with, therefore, there are many more people who flee their countries than the number of people who would eventually be able to seek asylum or be given refugee status. Then, international legal and human rights norms may also present an opportunity for economically-motivated irregular migrants to take advantage of the asylum-seeking procedure and the *non-refoulement* principle to prolong their stay in a particular transit country or to travel to a final destination country.

African irregular migration and asylum seeking in Turkey is a case in point which demonstrates the intermingling of asylum seeking and irregular migration. A survey of a non-representative sample of 120 African migrants in Istanbul in 2005 yielded findings supporting both of the above-mentioned situations.<sup>26</sup> The majority of West African respondents to the survey cited economic difficulties as

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<sup>23</sup> See İçduygu and Toktaş (2005).

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed elaboration of these figures, see the UNHCR Ankara Office webpage <http://www.unhcr.org.tr>.

<sup>25</sup> For a critical discussion on this, see for instance, Hyndman (2000).

<sup>26</sup> This discussion draws on Yüksekler and Brewer (2008), and Brewer and Yüksekler (2006).

their reason for migrating, whereas the great majority of Somalis cited threats to their lives and generalized violence. Somalis constitute the only significant African group to have sought asylum upon their arrival in Turkey. But for other national groups such as D.R. Congolese, Ethiopians and Mauritians, economic difficulties and security concerns were reported together, though very few people from these countries have applied for asylum in Turkey. On the other hand, for some asylum applicants, asylum seeking and irregular migration were intertwined, not only on the way to Turkey, but also, in the event that their refugee applications were rejected. The survey indicated that asylum seekers from Africa remained in Turkey after their cases got a final rejection, and then made attempts to illegally cross into Greece.

Characteristics of African migration to Turkey further indicate the blurred line between transit migration and asylum seeking.<sup>27</sup> The great majority of Somali and Mauritanian respondents to the aforementioned survey reported that they had paid smugglers to take them to Greece or Italy by boat, but added that they were left off the Turkish coast. Thus, these people were transit migrants and/or asylum seekers who had never intended to come to Turkey. Yet, there were also those who had willingly come to Turkey, wishing to treat it as a transit country. A case in point was the West African respondents to the survey who had entered Turkey on tourist visas before the visa regime for African countries was tightened in 2005. In the survey, about three quarters of Ghanaian and Nigerian respondents said that they intended to cross into Greece from Turkey. However, this is also the point where the meaning of transit migration blurs. The overwhelming majority of the respondents who had entered Turkey legally had expired visas and therefore were irregular. They were predominantly Nigerians and Ghanaians, followed by D.R. Congolese, and the average length of visa overstay was more than one year. Given that there is a large overlap between African migrants who have been in Turkey for a long time and those who express an “intention” to reach the EU, the meaning of “transit” becomes blurred.<sup>28</sup> Under these conditions, the majority of irregular African migrants and asylum seekers reported that they engaged in survival activities in the informal economy such as sweatshop production, street vending and odd jobs in the commercial sector. There were even a few women from Ethiopia and Eritrea among the respondents who worked as domestic labourers in the homes of foreign nations in Istanbul. Likewise, research on Iraqi Christian asylum seekers and transit migrants in Istanbul has shown that some women work as domestic labourers in Christian homes to support their families’ quest to move westward to Europe or North America.<sup>29</sup> Hence, not only the meaning of transit becomes vague as a stay is prolonged, but also the distinctions between transit migration, irregular labour migration and asylum seeking blur.

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<sup>27</sup> This is related to the increasing securitisation of migration regimes in Europe, as we discuss below. Regarding the securitisation of Sub-Saharan migration through the Maghreb, for instance, see Baldwin-Edwards (2006). Regarding the increasing role of human smuggling in response to the securitisation of migration, see Nadig, (2002).

<sup>28</sup> As Düvell (2006b) suggests, there is a need to untangle migrants’ “intentions” such as reaching the EU from actual migrant experiences in terms of research methodologies.

<sup>29</sup> Daş (2007).

### **Irregular Migrants' Profiles: Evidence from the 1995<sup>30</sup> and 2003 IOM Studies<sup>31</sup>**

By comparing the 1995 and 2003 studies on irregular migration in Turkey commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), it is possible to present an overview of the irregular migrants in the country. These studies on irregular migration in Turkey provide an insight into the personal characteristics of irregular migrants in Turkey, and they convey information about irregular migration.

The first 1995 IOM study, which concentrated entirely on transit migrants, was based on interviews with 159 irregular transit migrants in Turkey conducted in Istanbul and Ankara. This study reflected five major groups of transit irregular migrants: Iranians, Iraqis, Bosnians, Africans and "the others" who were mainly Asians. Almost three-quarters of the transit migrants in the sample were male. Three-fifths of the 159 respondents were below the age of 30 and more than three-fifths were either single or divorced. Most of them had urban backgrounds, had received some education and had been employed prior to their migration. A considerable number of these migrants arrived in Turkey without valid documents and they knew little about the country before arrival. Almost one in three respondents were planning to use traffickers/smugglers to reach their final destination countries, which included Denmark, Greece, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the USA.

The second IOM study, which primarily focused on irregular migrants though also included transit ones, was based on interviews with 53 irregular migrants and was conducted in Istanbul and Van provinces in 2003. Iranians and Iraqis each made up approximately one-quarter of the sample, Afghans made up another 14 per cent, with the remainder coming from some of the former Eastern Block countries, as well as from Africa. As a result, the 2003 IOM study included mainly migrants who consider Turkey a transit area *en route* to the developed countries of the West. This group constitutes migrants who entered Turkey illegally and wanted to leave the transit country illegally. Meanwhile, there were also respondents, citizens of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, who legally entered the country but drifted into illegality later on.

Although the predominant stereotype of irregular transit migrants is of young, unmarried, poor, uneducated, unskilled males from rural backgrounds, the actual profile of those interviewed in Turkey is quite different. For instance, as shown by the 2003 IOM study, irregular migrants in Turkey are mainly young, married men and women, from diverse national and ethnic backgrounds with a considerable degree of formal education and an urban background. Almost two-thirds of the migrants had already worked in their countries of origin before migrating. When asked about their approximate monthly income, some 55 per cent reported that their income was either low or below average, while four per cent had not received any income at all. Compare this with the 1995 study where two-thirds of the respondents had considered their income to be average. That means that the newcomers had a lower economic status as compared with their predecessors from 1995.

In the 2003 IOM study, nearly 40 per cent cited lack of employment opportunities and/or relative poverty as their reasons for migration. Almost two-thirds claimed to have left for political reasons, and almost half referred to social, cultural or religious difficulties. Another 42 per cent expressed concern about the possibility of a war. Clearly, a combination of reasons acted as push-and-pull factors. Results of the 1995 IOM survey indicated that migrants came for similar reasons.

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<sup>30</sup> See IOM (1996).

<sup>31</sup> See İçduygu (2003).



A large proportion of the irregular migrants interviewed in 2003 for the IOM 2003 study had entered Turkey without valid travel documents. Only two-fifths had entered Turkey with both a valid passport and a valid visa. In 1995, however, only two out of five respondents entered Turkey without a valid document. This indicates that there were more illegal entries in 2003 than in 1995. As discussed above, that these figures have increased from the second half of the 1990s, is confirmed by the official statistics. However, there was a considerable decrease in the number of illegal entries and departures in the first half of the 2000s.

By its very nature, irregular migration tends to become intertwined with asylum seeking. When asked whether they had applied for refugee status, 67 per cent replied that they had not, whereas 27 per cent had applied for it, of which only six per cent had actually been granted refugee status. Compared with the 1995 study, the numbers of applications for asylum in 2002 were lower. Many would have been unable to migrate to Turkey without the help of smugglers. In fact, 62 per cent arrived with the help of smugglers. When asked about their reasons for coming to Turkey, 50 per cent said they had done so because Turkey was a neighbouring country. Prior information concerning the country of destination usually plays an important part in the decision to migrate and successful adaptation to new circumstances.

Access to sufficient financial means obviously plays too a role in the decision to migrate. The wish to migrate implies substantial financial sacrifices for the potential migrant and their family. The need to pay smugglers or bribe other agents makes the whole process of irregular migration extremely expensive. Thus, to facilitate departure from their home countries, 45 per cent of the migrants had made some kind of payment either as a cash down payment to the smugglers. On average, payments cost the migrant some USD 825, ranging from a minimum of USD 50 to a maximum of USD 3,500. The average cost for passage to Turkey amounted to USD 1,433, ranging from USD 100 to USD 15,000. When compared with the average costs from the year 1995, migrants were paying less money in 2003 in terms of US dollars.

Contrary to the general perception that migration flows are fuelled by extensive social networks among migrant families in the countries of origin and destination, only 18 per cent of interviewed migrants mentioned the likelihood of family members joining them in Turkey. This would seem to indicate that their decision to migrate was taken individually and was not particularly related to family migration history concerning Turkey. Notwithstanding such declarations, family and migration connections seem obvious. Almost sixty per cent of the married couples interviewed were living in Turkey with their spouses, and about 46 per cent of these couples had their children with them.

In the IOM 2003 study, only 16 per cent had residence permits and none had work permits. As irregular migrants cannot be hired legally, they are usually found in precarious and low-paid jobs, so-called 3D jobs – dirty, difficult and dangerous. However, in 1995, a quarter of the respondents had residence permits, and nine percent had work permits. Almost 70 per cent of our respondents reported that their income was either low or below average, with five per cent claiming to have no income at all. Only two respondents reported that their income levels were above average in Turkey. Housing conditions for irregular migrants were generally poor. Half of the respondents shared rented accommodation, ten per cent lived alone, eight per cent lived with friends, four per cent with relatives and four per cent lived at their workplace, while six per cent lived in hotels and ten per cent in shelters.

In the 2003 study, fifty-nine per cent of the sample group had already attempted to leave Turkey. In 1995, however, as many as 71 per cent of respondents were in the same position. Half of them had tried to enter Italy in 2003, 12 per cent aimed to go to Germany while another 12 per cent had tried their luck entering a third country. Asked to explain their preferences for certain destination countries, only five per cent of the respondents referred to the ease of obtaining a visa as the primary incentive. Forty per cent chose their destination because they have family members living there. Twenty-six per cent said that having friends in the destination country was an important factor in their decision, and sixty-one per cent thought that they would be able to improve their standard of living in the destination

country. Most of the respondents acknowledged that as the preferred northern and western European countries of destination had tightened their admission policies, it would be necessary to enter the country illegally and look for means of regularising their status subsequently.

Since a large portion of the interviewed migrants in the 2003 IOM study were transit irregular migrants and had no valid travel documents, they needed some means of transportation. This was where the traffickers and smugglers came into play. The travel arrangements made by such intermediaries frequently involved clandestine passages through various third countries, as confirmed by 40 per cent of those interviewed. Italy (the most popular transit country), Germany (a close second), Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, France and Sweden were the most desirable countries of transit as well as of destination.

Concerning their onward journey and the likely cost involved, in the 2003 study, fifty-five per cent had no idea how much money in bribes and smuggling they would still have to pay to proceed to their destination, with 15 per cent believing that they would not have to pay anything. In terms of actual amounts, one respondent reckoned on a further payment of some USD 200, 15 per cent put the figure at USD 1,000 and another 10 per cent put it as high as USD 2,000. None had a clear idea about the actual costs involved in obtaining travel documents, with estimates ranging from USD 50 to USD 15,000.

In the 2003 study, for most of the respondents the lack of valid travel documents presented the main obstacle to their moving on from Turkey, nor did they have any guarantee of obtaining the appropriate documents to enter their preferred country of destination. In fact, 71 per cent had failed in their attempt to exit Turkey illegally. Regarding the option of returning to their home countries, only 14 per cent were ready to do so and then only under certain conditions, for example, if travel costs were paid, while 29 per cent did not consider this a viable alternative to onward migration. Asked whether any prior knowledge of the difficulties involved would have deterred them from migrating, an overwhelming 82 per cent replied negatively.

### **Irregular Migration in Turkey: Determinants and Consequences**

As noted elsewhere,<sup>32</sup> while thousands of irregular migrants “illegally” cross borders mostly from the southern and eastern borders of Europe to the northern and western parts of the continent, or as they work “informally” in the economies of Europe, it appears that *two* related things are happening paradoxically but, at the same time, in a complementary fashion. On the one hand, in the market-driven migratory regime around the continent, there have been complementarities between the economies which are in need of labour and the economies that have surplus labour. As a result, then, labour flows from the latter to the former. On the other hand, however, since many material conditions concerning the state control of borders and labour markets make free international migration unviable in Europe, many of these migrant labourers find themselves in a situation where though they violate the rules of border-crossings, or of residence and work permits, they are still able to migrate to and work in these economies. When these migrants are not able to migrate directly from their own homelands to the countries in Europe due to the highly restrictive and selective immigration policies, transit migration, in other words, step-by-step migration has often become a migration strategy to enter into the targeted destination countries in Europe. In short, when national economies in Europe need labour, “regular” or “irregular” is besides the point: and the economies of the southern European countries amply illustrates this tendency.

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<sup>32</sup>See İçduygu (2007a).

It is ironic that while most European countries advocate or actually adopt a range of restrictive control systems against incoming migrant flows, their economies are able to absorb thousands of irregular migrants without any great effort. Often relying on *restrictionist rhetoric of fewer benefits but more costs for immigration*, which in itself precludes the so-called rational assessment of immigration flows, these states emphasise that there is a need for continuous and strong intervention to restrict and regulate migration flows. On the other hand, however, mostly within *a frame of liberal economic rationality*, these economies experience labour shortages, concerns about the availability of labour in domestic markets rise, and consequently calls for immigrant labour increases. In addition to all these developments, thousands of irregular migrants, often using step-by-step migration strategy, pour into these countries, and become functional to the needs of economies there. Even if initially they are irregular migrants, they eventually become regularized ones.<sup>33</sup> Both in public and academic debates, this migratory picture could constantly be told by reference to the argument that relatively free migration has not accelerated at a pace comparable to relatively free-trade flows and free-capital movements. This implies that the conservative positions of nation-states towards immigration persist in this age of large-scale, accelerated globalisation.

This last point indicates “the increasingly *economistic* aspect to migration trends, and the economisation of movements of people.”<sup>34</sup> As migration discourses, policies and practices in Europe over the last decades has tended to concentrate on the benefits that migrant labourers bring to countries’ economies, the subsequent economisation of national migration policies and programmes<sup>35</sup> has become a widespread trend in international migration – not only attracting skilled and temporary migrants, but also practically relying on irregular immigrants who provide these economies with cheap labour, particularly in some sectors such as services and agricultural seasonal work. This has been particularly evident in the southern European countries, which have strived to be regionally competitive in Europe, by accepting these immigrant workers into their booming economies. In this context, response by irregular transit migrants serves the needs of certain sectors of the European economies.

It is widely accepted that after the collapse of the communist regimes in the early 1990s and later, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, immigrants to Europe were viewed as potential contributors to the insecure and uncertain climates surrounding economic, social and political spheres on the continent. As noted by Ibrahim, this view became “possible through the broadening of the concept of security and the linking of risk and threat to migrants.”<sup>36</sup> It is within this context that “the process in which migration discourse shifts towards an emphasis on security” is known as the securitisation of migration. By its mostly irregular nature, its dynamics which entail a state of uncertainty and insecurity, and its impact on people and societies, transit migration is perceived as posing a serious challenge to the long-standing paradigms of certainty and order in migrant-receiving countries.<sup>37</sup> One of the prominent features of this process of securitisation has been the production of a discourse of fear and proliferation of dangers with reference to the possibilities of arrivals of irregular and/or transit migrants poised in the neighbouring countries and regions. In fact, the securitisation of migration in Europe can be examined as a discourse through which the notion of irregular and/or transit migration is addressed in policy statements. An investigation of discourses on transit migration in the European sphere reveals how the securitisation of migration discourse is built upon the concept that irregular

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<sup>33</sup> For instance, there have been more than 4.5 million irregular immigrants who were regularised in the southern European countries in the last two decades.

<sup>34</sup> See McNamara (2007).

<sup>35</sup> See Hugo (2002), Iredale (1997), Richardson et al. (2002), and McNamara (2007).

<sup>36</sup> See Ibrahim (2005: 164).

<sup>37</sup> See Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002).

transit migration leads to a chaotic migratory system. An obvious manifestation of the securitisation of migration in Europe is the discussion over transit migration in Turkey as it was critically questioned in the country's EU accession process.

It is for this reason that the economisation and securitisation of migration regimes in Europe should also be assessed in terms of their impact beyond EU borders. The globalisation of migration (the fact that directions and motivations of immigration and emigration are currently much more diverse than they were until the 1980s) requires us also to view these twin processes from a global perspective. The potential numbers of migrants to the EU has risen since the 1980s as a result of developments within the global political economy, such as the debt crisis, structural adjustment policies and associated unemployment, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, civil wars and international conflicts. Yet globalisation has also transformed the labour markets of many middle-income countries in a way that affords the use of migrant labour for the first time both in the low-wage and the high-wage sectors: e.g. domestic labour and the high-skilled labour of business experts. Globalisation has also affected the EU economies; while unemployment increased, new labour needs both in high and low-wage sectors emerged. It is within this context that the securitisation and economisation of European migration regimes took place as we discussed above.

When we examine Turkey's position within the European migration systems in this light, the following observations can be made. First, since the 1980s Turkey has been a route for migrants and asylum seekers uprooted because of the aforementioned global processes. Second, the securitisation of migration has had repercussions for Turkey, in terms of channelling the ever increasing numbers of migrants who want to reach the EU through Turkey, or causing them to remain in Turkey. Related to this, the EU has demanded that Turkey, since its candidature in 1999, both securitize migration within its borders and conform fully to the norms of the international refugee regime. Third, irregular migration to Turkey is also economically motivated. So, it is possible to talk about the economisation of the migration regime in Turkey itself. Irregular labour migrants from especially CIS and Eastern European countries have been circulating to fill low-end service labour demands instigated by the Turkish urban middle classes. And, to some extent, transit migrants who have to enter the informal economy in order to survive or to finance their onward journey are part of the economisation of the migration regime.

Although the reality of irregular (transit) migration in Turkey emerged in the early 1980s, it was not an issue of concern in the country until the mid-1990s. In fact, there was no domestic discussion using the terms "irregular migration", "transit migration" or "irregular migrant", "transit migrants". In other words, irregular (transit) migration was ontologically present, but epistemologically absent. The study of irregular migration in Turkey, in fact, suffered from academic and public neglect in its early stages. Irregular (transit) migration through Turkey was not an area of study until it became an uncomfortable reality for the European core countries. When irregular migration was conceptualised and talked about in Europe, it also became an issue of discussion in Turkey. Indeed, Turkey's significant position as a '*sending country*', '*receiving country*', and '*transit country*', has become central to Turkey-EU relations, especially within the Eurocentric international migration and asylum regimes in particular, international migration debates, due to reasons such as the intermingling of international migration issues with the European Union's economic, social and political areas of integration. Within this framework, *it can be observed that while discussions on the issue of international migration in the EU in relation to Turkey are being held, it is repeatedly asked whether Turkey, in its position as a 'transit country', will be successful in managing migration control at the south-eastern gate of Europe, and, if so, to what extent, will it produce and implement policies in compliance with the EU-centric international migration and asylum regimes. It is also asked how Turkey will protect the south-eastern border of the EU from migration waves and this question will remain even if membership is no longer on the table.*

Turkey and the EU started full membership negotiations on October 3, 2005. In this new situation, issues of international migration are considered to be the key items on the agenda relating to Turkey's relations to the EU. Since then, various reports by the European Commission on Turkey have emphasised that this enlargement would be different from the previous ones, frequently making references to the issues of transit migration. For instance, in the report on Turkey's progress towards accession in the Commission's Statement for the European Union and European Parliament dated November 6, 2004, the following point was made: "Turkey, managing the new and long external borders of the EU will constitute a significant political challenge and will require large investment... Closer cooperation before and after the accession shall make it easier... to handle migration and asylum issues in addition to... human trafficking."<sup>38</sup>

As can be clearly observed in the debate on Turkey's EU membership, the notion of irregular and/or transit migration and many issues associated with it have become vital for discussions regarding EU-Turkish relations. Consequently, for instance, possible cooperation areas such as external border security for the EU, asylum, human smuggling and human trafficking, have become major issues of debate. One of the most widely debated issues in this context is the 'management of migration and asylum flows' arriving in the country, and in particular the question of how Turkey's state institutions and legal frameworks would handle the phenomenon of irregular transit migration and asylum. As elaborated elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> these debates have made clear that Turkey's integration into the EU depends not only on economic, social, and political transformations in the country, but also on specific policy matters. The issue of "migration management" is seen here to be a component of the country's Europeanisation or the "EU-isation" process.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, as the "Europeanisation" of national immigration and asylum policies and practices is not only a matter of policy, but also a matter of politics, the efforts to elaborate this process is uneven and vigorously debated.<sup>41</sup> The notion of "migration management" remains central to Europeanization, defined as "processes of construction, diffusion, and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms to a European model of governance, caused by forms of cooperation and integration in Europe."<sup>42</sup> In few places is this more relevant than in Turkey, where different kinds of national immigration and asylum policies and practices are infused with history, social validity, cultural notions, and political importance, which are intensely contested by the European influence.

That the EU process of introducing the new perception and new law on the management of immigration and asylum flow in Turkey plays a role is undisputable. Consequently, it is possible to make *two* important observations concerning the impact of Europeanisation on the transformation of irregular transit immigration- and asylum-related policies and practices in Turkey. *First*, the ongoing discussion implies the 'positive' impact of this process on these policies and practices: for example, the introduction of penal codes over trafficking and smuggling. Yet, though new legislation is welcome, the shortage of trained personnel dealing with asylum seekers and irregular migrants and the inadequacy of facilities for apprehended irregular migrants raise concerns about human-rights violations in detention centres. *Second*, as far as Turkey's reaction, or resistance, is concerned, the

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<sup>38</sup> The European Commission released a Progress Report on Turkey and a Recommendation based on the report on October 6, 2004. These documents stated that Turkey has adequately met the political criteria and recommended that Turkey's accession negotiations to the EU be initiated.

<sup>39</sup> See İçduygu (2007b).

<sup>40</sup> In a different context, on the issue of Europeanisation of civil society, Diez et al. (2005) refer to the notion of 'EU-ization' as a dominant form of Europeanisation in Turkey's European integration process.

<sup>41</sup> See İçduygu (2004: 93) and Kirişçi (2005a: 355-7).

<sup>42</sup> Bulmer and Radaelli (2004: 4).

influence of the EU on irregular transit migration- and asylum- related policies and practices seems to vary: for instance, the impact of the EU process on some specific and practical asylum issues was often stronger than it was on general and normative immigration concerns. It seems that Turkey's sceptical perspective on the Europeanisation of national immigration and asylum policies and practices is linked to the question of burden-sharing versus burden-shifting. Of course, this is again not surprising as the whole Europeanisation process often proceeds as a top-down process originating from the core -- in this case the EU -- which is then met with the resistance of a bottom-up process coming from a periphery -- in this case, Turkey.

On the Turkish side, indeed, there is a feeling that EU policies and practices for managing migration and the array of related restrictive measures shift the burden of controlling migration to countries on the periphery, like Turkey, with the conclusion of readmission agreements often being cited as a case in point. Likewise, Turkish policy-makers are determined that Turkey should not become a buffer zone between the immigrant-attracting European core and the emigrant-producing peripheral regions. Therefore, Turkish authorities advocate the need for burden-sharing, instead of what is being seen as a case of burden-shifting, especially in relation to a phenomenon such as irregular transit migration or asylum that ultimately targets various European countries. On the other hand, it appears that the EU authorities are urging Turkey to devote more resources and energy to its efforts to manage and control migration and asylum flows across and within its borders. Of course, these demands and considerations are central to EU-Turkish relations and create many areas of concern for both sides, from security and human rights issues to economics and politics. Practically and naturally, however, the likelihood of any progress in this field is strongly linked to the negotiations between the Commission and the Turkish authorities on burden-sharing.

## Concluding Remarks

While scholarship on irregular migration is accumulating, it is possible to make two general observations: one is the increasing number of inquiries concerning irregular migration cases, and, second, is the ongoing discussion into the meaning and nature of irregular migration. The former locates the phenomenon in a migration system approach by taking it for granted in terms of its presence in a wider migratory context, and the latter usually questions whether it is not a mere re-construction of reality rather than something original in terms of its content. In other words, irregular migration is debated epistemologically. Emphasising this problem, Düvell has argued that "irregular (transit) migration is as much a discourse as it is a scientific concept", in some ways the EU's "war cry" to countries expected to keep migrants away from EU borders.<sup>43</sup> What we have sought to do in this paper is to unpack the term "irregular migration" in the Turkish context to point to both its discursive and analytical aspects. Through a discussion of existing empirical evidence on irregular migrants, we have shown that there is a reality of irregular migration in Turkey. But also that the borders between the reality of irregular migration, regular migration and asylum seeking are blurred, rather than clear-cut boundaries. In order to make sense of these blurred boundaries, we have also sought to contextualise the irregular migration experience of Turkey within the securitisation and economisation of European migration regimes, as well as the knock on securitisation and economisation of Turkey's own migration regime. In doing so, we attempted too to clarify the discursive dimension of irregular migration, without dismissing its reality.

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<sup>43</sup> See Düvell (2006b).

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**Table 1: Indicative Numbers for Migration to Turkey, 1996–2006**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Irregular Migration</b>	<b>18800</b>	<b>28400</b>	<b>29400</b>	<b>31600</b>	<b>94600</b>	<b>92400</b>	<b>82800</b>	<b>56200</b>	<b>61200</b>	<b>43841</b>	<b>51983</b>
<b>Illegal entries/departures</b>					51400	57300	44200	303	34745	19920	18876
<b>Overstays</b>					43200	35100	38600	25852	26455	23921	33107
<b>Asylum applications</b>		<b>5100</b>	<b>6800</b>	<b>6600</b>	<b>5700</b>	<b>5200</b>	<b>3794</b>	<b>3966</b>	<b>3908</b>	<b>3914</b>	<b>4548</b>
<b>of which: Afghan</b>					100	400	47	77	341	365	339
<b>of which: Iran</b>		1700	2000	3800	3900	3500	2505	3108	2029	1716	2297
<b>of which: Iraq</b>		3300	4700	2500	1600	1000	974	342	964	1047	724
<b>Residence Permits</b>					<b>168100</b>	<b>161254</b>	<b>157670</b>	<b>152203</b>	<b>155500</b>	<b>131594</b>	<b>186586</b>
<b>of which: work</b>					24200	22414	22556	21650	27500	22130	22805
<b>of which: study</b>					24600	23946	21548	21810	15000	25240	24258
<b>of which: other</b>					119300	114894	113566	108743	113000	84224	139523

Sources: UNHCR Ankara Office (2002-2006), Bureau for Foreigners, Borders, and Asylum at the Directorate of General Security of the Ministry of Interior (2000-2006)

**Table 2: Irregular Migration in Turkey: Apprehended Cases, 1995-2006**

Country	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
Afghanistan	24	68	81	921	2476	8746	9701	4246	2178	3442	2363	3665	37911
Albania		1		9	792	1026	1137	580	341	318	220	57	4481
Algeria	27	25	69	207	102	430	305	542	378	397	375	144	3001
Armenia	4	2		1	98	474	452	505	494	835	858	933	4656
Azerbaijan	21	3	3	10	620	2262	2426	2349	1608	1591	1410	937	13240
Bangladesh	113	322	301	2408	1193	3228	1497	1810	1722	3271	1524	2313	19702
Bulgaria	21	22	39	103	1005	1699	1923	3132	989	550	363	376	10222
Egypt	4	12	99	29	94	382	184	182	222	257	137	80	1682
Georgia	37	9	9	5	809	3300	2693	3115	1826	2294	2348	1989	18434
Germany		1	1		372	629	458	586	988	1477	984	634	6130
India	2	25	18	102	189	779	599	475	846	803	206	105	4149
Iran	252	362	364	1116	5281	6825	3514	2508	1620	1265	1141	972	25220
Iraq	2128	3319	5689	14237	11546	17280	18846	20926	3757	6393	3591	6412	114124
FYROM*	1				439	488	384	197	185	105	54	0	1851
Moldova	19		17	5	5098	8312	11454	9611	7728	5728	3462	1575	53009
Morocco	28	53	93	295	369	1401	849	603	361	402	171	138	4763
Nigeria	1	20	30	84	137	450	301	733	117	142	34	73	2122
Pakistan	708	435	307	1798	2650	5027	4829	4813	6258	9396	11001	3508	50730
PRC				1	115	545	264	674	787	788	339	295	3808
Romania	68	12	107	36	3395	4500	4883	2674	2785	1785	1274	1013	22532
Russian Federation	5	4	52	2	1695	4554	3893	2139	2130	1266	1152	730	17622
Sierra Leone				20	42	462	273	121	14	6	2	6	946
Stateless					61	322	235	0	0	0	0	0	618
Syria	78	86	144	476	776	1399	782	462	623	1097	983	1238	8144
Tunisia	3	48	81	44	76	255	216	191	274	301	300	292	2081
Turkey					2085	3289	5304	6951	5660	3341	2164	2052	30846
Ukraine	9	4	17	4	1715	4527	3451	2874	1947	1341	1335	1004	18228
UK		2		4	233	643	423	451	510	563	662	537	4028
Uzbekistan	1	1			142	587	535	533	584	714	652	287	4036
Other	7808	13948	20603	7382	3632	7695	8055	6908	8461	10644	662	2006	97804
Unknown		20	315	127	292	2998	2499	1934	826	716	4074	16606	30407
<b>Total</b>	<b>11362</b>	<b>18804</b>	<b>28439</b>	<b>29426</b>	<b>47529</b>	<b>94514</b>	<b>92365</b>	<b>82825</b>	<b>56219</b>	<b>61228</b>	<b>43841</b>	<b>51983</b>	<b>616527</b>

\*Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia

Source: Compiled by the author from data obtained from UNHCR Ankara Office, (2002-2005). Bureau for Foreigners, Borders, and Asylum at the Directorate of General Security of the Ministry of Interior, (2000-2006)

**Table 3: Irregular Migration in Turkey: “Illegal Border-Crossings”, 2006-2008**

September 2006 - February 2008																			
	2006				2007												2008		
	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May.	June.	July.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Total
<b>Afghanistan</b>	41	72	33	83	14	24	38	174	706	527	639	665	979	461	518	211	128	83	5396
<b>Algeria</b>	10		7			2		1		3	5	6	5	1	2	8	13		63
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	1					2			2	1	1	8	20	5	14	13	7	23	97
<b>Bangladesh</b>	7	9	5			20	5	28	28	36	47	36	62	32	38	28	41	12	434
<b>Burma</b>										19	11	51	109	235	700	638	615	214	2592
<b>China</b>		8	8	18	14	33	8		13	34	45	36	59	45	17	35	74	21	468
<b>Egypt</b>			1		2	1			1	4	4		2	9	5	1			30
<b>Eretria</b>									3	78	85	198	131	73	67	74	4	38	751
<b>Georgia</b>		19	13	17	16	29	34		77	89	64	100	81	80	99	77	61	80	936
<b>India</b>		4	1	3			2		2	9		10	3	10	2	2	5	1	54
<b>Iran</b>	11	20	16	30	25	11	34	50	76	40	107	111	107	78	97	83	97	63	1056
<b>Iraq</b>	294	412	246	197	144	141	182	568	540	770	1024	1202	1510	611	321	373	322	124	8981
<b>Lebanon</b>	1	2							3	1		3	2	1	8				21
<b>Mauritania</b>	73	100	104	101	48	47	29	158	233	308	352	493	647	800	1038	233	190	90	5044
<b>Moldova</b>				2					1	2	10		4	14	14		3	7	57
<b>Morocco</b>	1		3	2	3	3	4	4	6	9	3		2	5	10	5	9	2	71
<b>Pakistan</b>	17	62	16	6		81	9	275	399	337	222	430	964	1086	479	120	127	73	4703
<b>Palestine</b>	44	57	122	226	133	237	488	534	536	891	1122	949	1917	897	873	369	397	408	10200
<b>Rwanda</b>									3	6	7	28	17	10	10	3	4	3	91
<b>Somalia</b>	82	106	138	338	98	130	172	209	156	166	199	308	550	391	243	129	83	192	3690
<b>Sri Lanka</b>				6						21	11	11	24	17	8	4	5	4	111
<b>Sudan</b>		1			2				22	2	9	3	4	2	1				46
<b>Syria</b>	19	21	50	79	42	62	111	15	102	93	104	57	117	69	17	47	48	46	1099
<b>Tunisia</b>	1	3	2		1	11	3	3	2	9	2	1	4	4	6	3		1	56
<b>Turkish</b>	55	54	51	53	32	75	123	94	159	118	135	98	173	75	47	54	60	54	1510
<b>Turkmenistan</b>									1		2		10		4	5	4	7	33
<b>Unknown</b>	707		1									2			2				712
<b>Total</b>	1364	950	817	1161	574	909	1242	2113	3071	3573	4210	4806	7503	5011	4640	2515	2297	1546	48302

Source: General Command of Gendarmerie and the Coast Guard Command

**Table 4: Irregular Migration in Turkey: “Illegal” Border-Crossings By Location, 2006-2008**

Borders	Bulgaria Borders		Aegean Sea		Georgia Borders		Iran Borders		Mixed Borders		Syria Borders		Greece Borders		Total	
	NE*	NAP*	NE	NAP	NE	NAP	NE	NAP	NE	NAP	NE	NAP	NE	NAP	NE	NAP
<b>Sept.06</b>									81	1362					81	1362
<b>Oct.06</b>	2	5	2	37	1	2	14	71	2	74	21	83	28	693	70	965
<b>Nov.06</b>	1	5	1	29			13	46	2	65	17	37	26	692	60	874
<b>Dec.06</b>	3	10	4	73	1	1	13	42	8	156	14	49	25	842	68	1173
<b>Jan.07</b>							11	36	3	30	15	47	22	471	51	584
<b>Feb.07</b>	2	2	1	5	1	1	13	131	1	9	22	130	21	635	61	913
<b>Mar.07</b>	4	15	1	47			9	19	2	78	18	80	30	984	64	1223
<b>Apr.07</b>	3	11	2	46	1	1	18	139	32	1308	10	64	27	648	93	2217
<b>May.07</b>	4	59	5	64	1	3	16	151	42	1787	25	95	29	1091	122	3250
<b>June.07</b>	7	34	10	234			16	123	30	1804	21	88	27	1097	111	3380
<b>July.07</b>			7	136	1	1	13	55	31	2540	26	108	31	1236	109	4076
<b>Agu.07</b>	2	8	2	29	3	6	14	171	31	2112	28	314	44	2211	124	4851
<b>Sept.07</b>	1	12	7	124	2	3	20	171	32	4923	27	203	29	1886	118	7322
<b>Oct.07</b>	4	8	5	165	1	1	17	109	30	3094	28	164	30	1303	115	4844
<b>Nov.07</b>	1	2	6	171			12	86	31	3027	22	104	26	1242	98	4632
<b>Dec.07</b>	1	2	1	19	1	1	9	45	30	1800	22	90	28	686	92	2643
<b>Jan.08</b>							5	54	30	1399	22	120	26	681	83	2254
<b>Feb.08</b>			6	135			6	8	30	1062	14	52	22	482	78	1739
<b>Total</b>	35	173	60	1314	13	20	219	1457	448	26630	352	1828	471	16880	1598	48302

\*NE: Number of Events; NAP: Number of apprehended people

Source: General Command of Gendarmerie and the Coast Guard Command

**Table 5: Asylum Applications in Turkey, 1997–2006**

	Iranians		Iraqis		Other		Total	
	Cases	Persons	Cases	Persons	Cases	Persons	Cases	Persons
<b>1997</b>	746	1392	1275	2939	83	117	2104	4448
<b>1998</b>	1169	1979	2350	4672	124	187	3643	6838
<b>1999</b>	2069	3843	1148	2472	184	290	3401	6605
<b>2000</b>	2125	3926	791	1671	108	180	3024	5777
<b>2001</b>	1841	3485	497	998	372	709	2710	5177
<b>2002</b>	1456	2505	402	974	219	315	2077	3794
<b>2003</b>	1715	3092	159	342	373	514	2247	3948
<b>2004</b>	1225	2030	472	956	540	922	2237	3908
<b>2005</b>	1021	1716	490	1047	753	1151	2264	3914
<b>2006</b>	1343	2297	364	724	1094	1527	2801	4548
<b>2007</b>	1024	1668	1738	3470	1651	2502	4413	7640
<b>Total</b>	15734	27933	9686	20265	5501	8414	30921	56597

**Source:** Compiled by the author from data obtained from the UNHCR Ankara Office and Bureau for Foreigners, Borders, and Asylum at the Directorate of General Security of the Ministry of Interior, (2000-2006).