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Analysing the Causes of the Refugee Crisis and the Key
Role of Turkey: Why Now and Why So Many?

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EUI Working Paper **RSCAS** 2015/95

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Challenging the notion of Fortress Europe, the BORDERLANDS research project investigates relations between the European Union and the states of North Africa and the Mediterranean Middle East (MENA) through the concept of borderlands. This concept emphasises the disaggregation of the triple function of borders demarcating state territory, authority, and national identity inherent in the Westphalian model of statehood. The project explores the complex and differentiated process by which the EU extends its unbundled functional and legal borders and exports its rules and practices to MENA states, thereby transforming that area into borderlands. They are connected to the European core through various border regimes, governance patterns, and the selective outsourcing of some EU border control duties.

The overarching questions informing this research is whether, first, the borderland policies of the EU, described by some as a neo-medieval empire, is a functional consequence of the specific integration model pursued inside the EU, a matter of foreign policy choice or a local manifestation of a broader global phenomenon. Second, the project addresses the political and socio-economic implications of these processes for the 'borderlands', along with the questions of power dynamics and complex interdependence in EU-MENA relations.

Funded by the European Research Council (ERC) within the 7th Framework Programme, the BORDERLANDS project is hosted at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, and directed by Professor Raffaella A. Del Sarto.

For more information: <http://borderlands-project.eu/Home.aspx>



Abstract

In this paper, I seek to explain the causes of the massive migratory flows from Turkey to Greece since August 2015. The context of conflict and regional turbulence in the Middle East, together with several events taking place at the beginning of 2015, in which Turkey was directly or indirectly involved, triggered in August the unprecedented refugee crisis that we are still witnessing today. These events led to a sea change, in the period of the 9th to the 14th of August, in the Turkish position towards refugees and in the Syrian refugees' willingness to wait in Turkey till the end of the war in Syria. The intersection, during these days, between Turkey's decreasing interest in receiving and controlling Syrian refugees within its territories and the increasing motivation of a significant number of Syrian refugees to leave Turkey, sparked the beginning of the current refugee crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean route. Finally, I will argue that this refugee crisis has accelerated the EU-Turkey accession negotiations in an unprecedented way, and at the same time has increased the leverage power of Turkey.

Keywords

Refugees, European Union, Turkey, migration, refugee crisis.

Introduction

Since the summer of 2015, the phenomenon of the massive arrivals of refugees on Greek shores and the shocking images of refugees trying to get to Germany by crossing the Western Balkans has demanded the attention of politicians, media and experts.

It is the question of how to offer a response to the current refugee crisis in Europe, as well as the analysis of the decisions of EU leaders in redistributing the Syrian refugees, that has mostly captured the world's attention. However, all the analysis offered so far has left aside or overlooked two key questions: First, why is it that so many refugees and migrants have arrived since August 2015? Second, why are they currently arriving on Greek shores? Both questions have been attributed to the existence of smuggler networks, the war in Syria or to the advance of the Islamic State's positions in the Middle East. However, all three factors have been present over the last three years, without causing such huge numbers of refugees and migrants to arrive on Greek shores.

Therefore, to date, a comprehensive analysis has not been offered, to explain why so many refugees and migrants have arrived on the shores of Greece from Turkey since the summer of 2015. This paper seeks to fill this gap by linking the analysis of two key aspects that are often neglected: First, I will analyse the push-factors of flows of irregular migration and asylum-seekers in the Mediterranean, from a global and international perspective. To this end I carry out an analysis that takes into account not only the context in Syria, but also traces the origins of the main nationalities arriving in Greece.

Second, it is necessary to understand the role and context of Turkey in relation to the massive arrival at the Greek shores from Turkey since the summer of 2015. Although all the refugees and migrants arriving in Greece have had to cross the whole of Turkish territory before boarding a boat at the Turkish shores, the role played by Turkey in the current refugee crisis has been overlooked or put aside. This is surprising, if we take into account that usually the attention of politicians and the media tends to focus on the last transit state from where migratory flows board ship to reach Europe.¹ In carrying out this analysis, I will argue that the massive migratory flows from Turkey to Greece since August 2015 can be explained as the result of four main factors, of which two converged from the 9th to the 14th of August 2015, triggering an unprecedented and uncontrollable number of arrivals. The first of these factors is the unprecedented context of conflict and regional turbulence in the Middle East that has existed for years and is increasingly unlikely to end any time soon. Second, events and political decisions in the EU borderlands and Syria's neighbouring countries have caused a funnel effect, cornering and concentrating a significant number of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Third, since the beginning of 2015 several factors have pushed the Turkish government to switch its foreign policy strategy regarding the Syrian conflict and its attitude to the Syrian refugees arriving or living in Turkey. And fourth, decisions by the Turkish government in 2015, as well as the latest developments of the Syrian war, have pushed ever more Syrian refugees into leaving Turkey, seeking a better life in Europe. These events and developments taking place from the 9th to the 14th of August 2015 led the third and fourth of these factors to converge, causing the current situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

To conclude, I will argue that this refugee crisis has accelerated the EU-Turkey accession negotiations in an unprecedented way, at the same time as increasing Turkey's leverage power. In recent decades the EU has mostly managed to control migration flows by fortifying its external territorial borders, as well as by creating buffer zones at the EU borderlands (Del Sarto 2010). However, the current refugee crisis shows that these control measures have proved to be useless without the support of Turkey. In other words, the EU has vulnerable dependency (Keohane and Nye

¹ The migratory flows reaching Italy in 2011 were explained by the political situation in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya during the Arab Spring, and the flows arriving in Italy in 2014 were attributed to the chaotic situation in Libya.

2012, 10-11) on Turkey, if vulnerability is seen as the inability of the EU to adopt alternatives when facing external changes (in this case the refugee crisis). Moreover, because of the EU's fears, and its need to control migration, Turkey is managing to use its cooperation on migration control as an "effective card" (Cassarino 2009 and 2010) to pressure the EU and in turn to obtain significant benefits.

1. Magnitude and origins of the refugee crisis on European shores

Since the summer of 2015, the migration flows have been generally summed up as a Syrian refugee crisis. However, the refugees and migrants arriving on the Greek and Italian shores also come from other regions and conflicts. In order to understand and evaluate the nature and magnitude of the present refugee crisis it is necessary to contrast and observe the origins and push-factors of the people arriving on European shores.

Although the Syrian conflict might play an important role in the present refugee crisis, it is important to remember that in 2014 "only" 25% of the total migrants that arrived in Italy by sea were Syrian nationals (41,941 of the total 170,099). In 2015, more Eritreans (37,796), Nigerians (19,576), Somalis (11,020) and Sudanese (8,692) have arrived on the Italian coast than Syrians (7,232) (see Graph 3).²

Regarding the flows arriving on the Greek shores, up to the 1st of August 2015, of 340,991 people that arrived in Greece, half of them (175,375) were Syrians. The other half came from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Albania and Iraq, among other countries.³ Moreover as I explain later, the proportion of Syrian refugees arriving on the Greek coasts since the beginning of June has increased (see Graph 2) compared to other nationalities.

Several data stress the need to analyse carefully the events that have taken place in Syria and its neighbouring countries, in order to understand the current refugee crisis. First of all, no clear reason has yet been acknowledged for the increase in arrivals in Greece, from 65,282 migrants at the end of June 2015 to 399,326 at the end of September 2015. In other words, more than 334 thousand people arrived in Greece from Turkey in less than three months. To keep the figures in perspective, this means that the number of people that reached Greece from Turkey in the summer of 2015 is twice the number of migrants that arrived in Italy during the whole of year 2014. This is also four times the number of people that arrived in Italy in 2011, as a consequence of the revolts in the Maghreb during the Arab Spring (64,261).

In case this is not sufficiently clear, if we aggregate the arrivals of migrants, by all routes, in Europe in 2013 and 2014 (107,365 and 283,532 respectively) the sum is similar to the total number of arrivals in Greece alone, between August and November 2015. Therefore, there is no doubt that we are experiencing an exceptional situation that demands all our attention, if we are to understand the factors causing it.

Indeed, by taking the data collected by the IOM Missing Migrants Project it has been possible to trace approximately the periodical waves of maritime arrivals of migrants in Italy and Greece since the beginning of June. This record of arrivals allows us to observe an astonishing fact that seems to have been neglected till now: from the 9th to the 14th of August 2015 an unprecedented wave of migrants arrived in Greece from Turkey (see Graph 1), more precisely 42.000 migrants in less than 5 days.⁴

² Curiously, Libyan migrants do not even rank among the top ten nationalities that reached Italy by sea in 2014 and 2015.

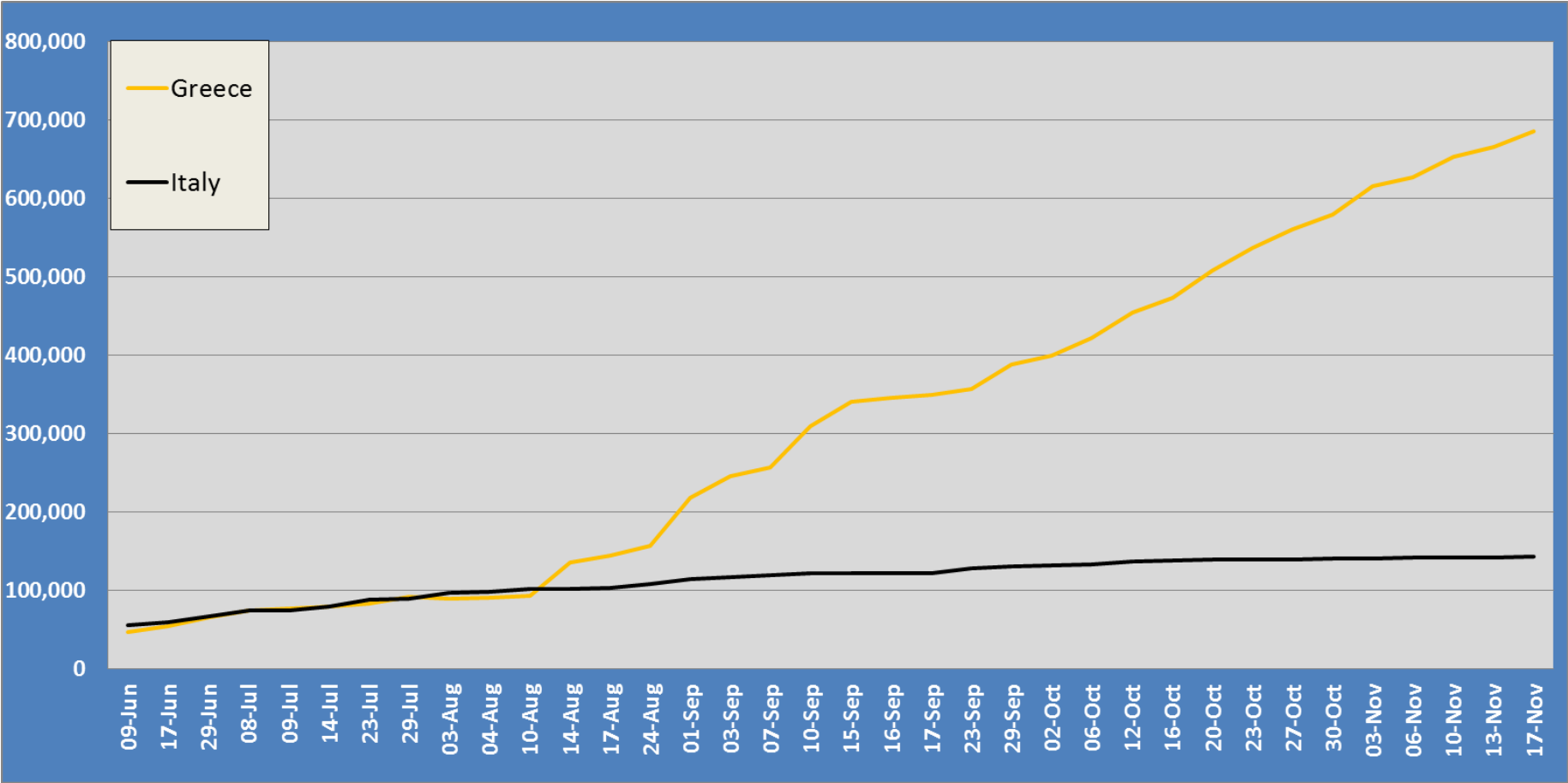
³ See Missing Migrants Project of the International Organization for Migration.

⁴ Again to keep these figures in perspective, the number of migrants/refugees that arrived on the Greek coasts during these 5 days is similar to the total number of arrivals in Greece for the whole year of 2014.

As we can see in Graph 1, from the beginning of June till the 9th of August 2015, both destinations, Italy and Greece, were experiencing the same daily rate of arrivals. For example, at the end of March both destinations had received a similar total number of arrivals (10,252 in Italy and 14,151 in Greece).⁵ However, after the 9th of August the Eastern Mediterranean route saw an exponential growth. This growth went from a total of 92,491 arrivals by August the 9th to 134,988 by August the 14th, and continued at this impressive rate till the total of arrivals by November the 17th stood at 685,758.

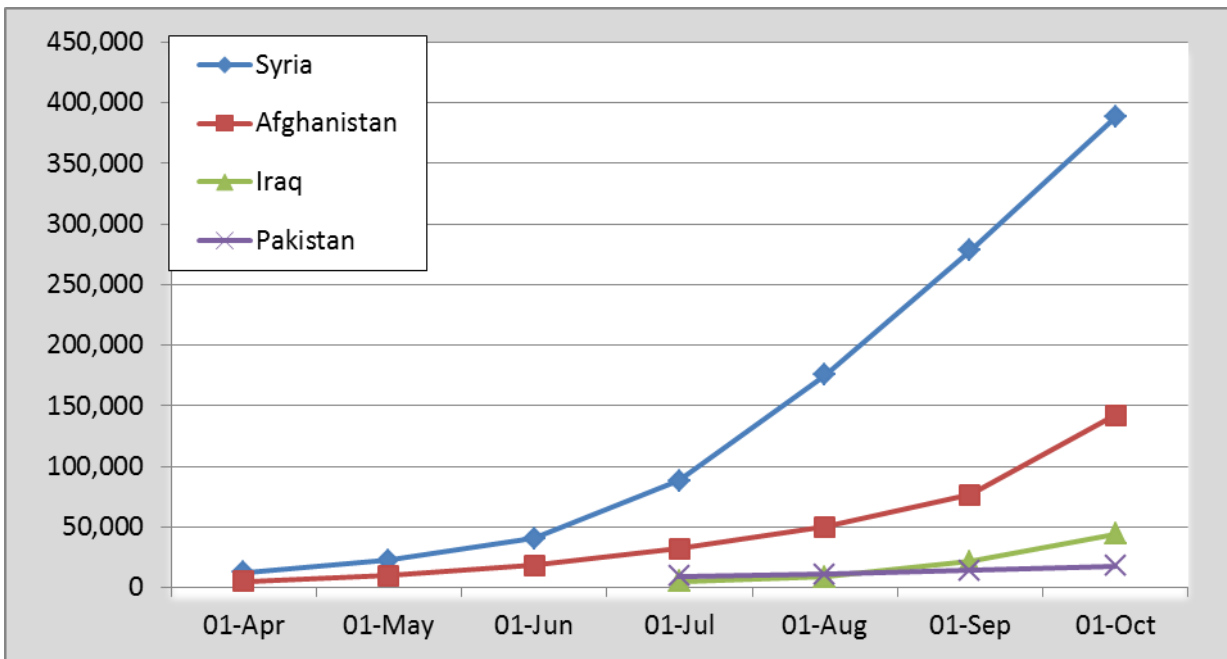
⁵ See Frontex FRAN Quarterly 1 (January – March 2015).

Graph 1: Migrant maritime arrivals in Italy and Greece from 9th June to the 17th November 2015



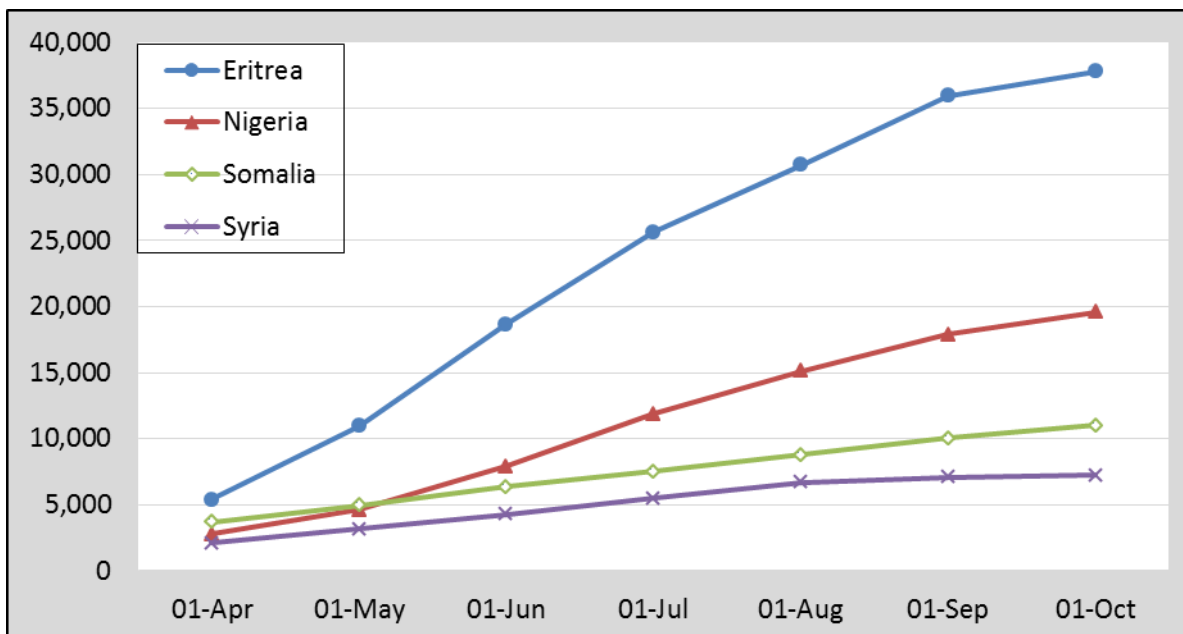
Source: own elaboration from IOM Missing Migrants Project

Graph 2: Migrant maritime arrivals in Greece by nationality from 1st April to 1st October 2015



Source: own elaboration from IOM Missing Migrants Project

Graph 3: Migrant maritime arrivals in Italy by nationality from 1st April to 1st of October 2015



Source: own elaboration from IOM Missing Migrants Project

Observing the arrivals by nationality (Graph 2), we can see that on the Eastern Mediterranean route, most of the people arriving in Greece are Syrian refugees. However, it is interesting to observe that whereas in April 2015 the number of Syrians and Afghans arriving in Greece was approximately the same, we can see that since June 2015, the arrival of Syrian refugees has exponentially increased compared to the Afghan, Iraqi and Pakistani refugees.

In the case of the Central Mediterranean route we can see that in contrast to the eastern route, it has maintained a similar rate of arrivals till October 2015. Although the Eastern Mediterranean route has been the centre of attention since the summer of 2015, we must not forget that 143,114 migrants have also arrived in Italy from January to November 2015. Following the present rate of arrivals,⁶ Italy will receive a similar total number of migrants this year to that of 2014. Analysing this route by nationality, we can see that the proportion of Eritreans, Nigerians and Somalis arriving on the Italian shores has increased since April 2015 (see next Graph 3), while the rate of Syrians taking this route seems to decrease since the beginning of August.

These data raise several questions such as: What happened between the 9th and 14th of August 2015 to provoke such a dramatic increase in refugees arriving on the Greek shores? Why have so many Syrian refugees decided to get to Europe by the Eastern Mediterranean route, instead of the previously generally used Central Mediterranean route? Why have so many Syrian refugees decided to migrate to Europe since the beginning of the summer 2015?

2. Analysing the origins of the refugee crisis

In order to answer the previous questions it is necessary to understand that the first reason for the current refugee crisis lies in the fact that the current turbulent, violent and unstable context in Africa and the Middle East has brought together migrants and refugees from different origins, all seeking a better life in Europe. Although Syrian refugees are the main nationality arriving on European shores, other nationalities are also forced to migrate due to the tragic situations in their home countries.

Afghanistan has suffered not only more than a decade of economic and political instability, but above all the increasing insurgent activity led by the Taliban, which has caused more than 5,000 civil casualties this year according to the UN.⁷ This explains why the Afghan community is currently the second largest group of refugees to have reached European territory, as well as the second largest group of refugees in the world (2,6 million Afghan refugees).⁸ According to Frontex, at least 145,000 Afghans have crossed the European borders since 2009.

Iraq has also been immersed in more than a decade of sectarian violence that has reached critical levels since 2014. Since the beginning of 2015, there has been a deterioration in the situation, due to the advance of the Islamic State towards Mosul and Erbil, precipitating the exodus of a significant part of the population. Most of these people fled towards Iraqi Kurdistan, but others have also tried to get to Turkey, Jordan, and Europe.

Experts, politicians and journalists have, too, paid scant attention to the current situation in Eritrea or the possible reasons for the substantial migratory flows leaving the country. Eritrea is one of the most closed and repressive regimes in Africa, governed uninterruptedly by Isaias Afewerki for over twenty years. Both men and women aged 18–55 must complete compulsory military service for a period of around 18 months, but this can also last indefinitely.⁹ During this period conscripts are regularly subject to torture and sexual abuse, and many are used as forced labour in government construction projects.¹⁰ For these reasons, and also because the police operate a shoot-to-kill policy to prevent Eritrean citizens from approaching the border, Eritrea has been described as an open-air

⁶ For example, during the weekend of 19-20th of September 2015, 2,000 migrants arrived in Italy. See *Il Quotidiano del Sud* (20/09/2015) “Oltre duemila migranti accolti in Calabria: Due sbarchi organizzati a Reggio e Crotone”

⁷ *Al Jazeera* (16/09/2015) “Afghanistan: The other refugee crisis”; UN News Centre (18/08/2015) “Record civilian casualties and widening conflict stretch humanitarian capacities in Afghanistan – UN”.

⁸ See UNHCR (2015) “Global trends: Forced displacement 2014 in 2014”

⁹ *Al Jazeera* (3/10/2014): “Escaping Eritrea’s ‘open prison’”

¹⁰ *Le Monde* (19/05/2015): “Cartes sur table : comprendre les migrations vers l’Europe”

prison. This explains why since 2011, more than 80 thousand Eritreans (11,298 in 2013 and 2,600 in 2012, according to Frontex)¹¹ have arrived in Italy using the Central Mediterranean route.

Yet another root cause of migration which has been ignored is the link between irregular migration flows in the Mediterranean and the activity of the terrorist group Boko Haram in Nigeria. This terrorist group emerged in 2009, but it was only in April 2014, with the kidnapping of hundreds of schoolgirls, that it made the headlines around the world. The increasing presence of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria in the last couple of years, and the escalation of their actions, meant that by the end of 2014 over 1.5 million people had fled the conflict zone. In this sense, there is a link between the increasing violence in the country in 2014, and the dramatic increase in the number of Nigerians arriving in Italy, which shot up from 358 in 2012 to 8,570 in 2014.

Therefore, several long lasting conflicts have worsened and coincided in 2015, leading to what the UN has referred to as one of the worse humanitarian crises since World War II.¹² Taking into account this context, the next step is to find what it was that triggered the exponential growth in the route from Turkey to Greece since August the 9th.

3. Why now and why so many?

Although the current refugee crisis and the massive arrivals in Greece of migrants/refugees from/via Turkey since August caught Europe off-guard, the origins of this crisis were conceived a long time ago. Several events taking place in Syria's neighbouring countries, but above all the events in Turkey and the decisions of the Turkish government in 2015, forged and triggered the present refugee crisis. As follows I will describe these factors influencing the uncontrollable arrival of migrants and refugees from the Turkish shores.

3.1 Cornering Syrian refugees in Turkey? Contextual factors and policies at the European external borderlands

Events and political decisions in Syria's neighbouring countries have caused a funnel effect, cornering and concentrating a significant number of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Already at the end of 2014, the UN was warning that future crises of refugees were to come, when they announced that Syrian refugees in Syria's neighbouring countries were facing a disastrous and hungry winter due to the UN's World Food Programme funding crisis.¹³ This insufficient budget has caused since the end of 2014 the living conditions in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon to deteriorate, and in turn, many Syrian refugees to decide to leave the camps.

Moreover, although Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt welcomed a large proportion of the Syrian refugees from the beginning of the civil war in 2011, since 2014 they have changed their policy towards them, and have reinforced border controls, seeking to reduce the number of arrivals. Due to a lack of resources and international support, and due to the fact that in countries such as Lebanon Syrian refugees represent 20% of the total population, Syria's neighbouring countries have since 2014 adopted restrictive policies towards Syrians not registered as asylum seekers. For example, the Jordanian government adopted in July 2014 a new policy consisting of cutting off any humanitarian assistance to any refugee to leave the confines of the camps without previous official authorization.

¹¹ Frontex (2015) "Annual Risk Analysis"

¹² UNHCR (18/06/2015) "Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase"

¹³ The Guardian (01/12/2015) "1.7m Syrian refugees face food crisis as UN funds dry up"

These refugees could be evicted, incarcerated or deported back to Syria.¹⁴ This explains why the European Council on Refugees and Exiles has reported that many Syrian refugees are coming back to Syria from Jordan “rather than entering the country due to lack of means of livelihood, or in an attempt to reunite with family members who could not enter or were returned from Jordan”.¹⁵

In addition to this, the EU fortification strategy in the recent years has indirectly cornered and concentrated migrants and refugees in Turkey, in turn making the Turkish-Greek maritime route their only escape option. This strategy has consisted in three main measures:

First, in December 2012, Greece completed the construction of a 10.5km fence at its land border with Turkey. This 4 metre tall fence, made of strong barbed wire and equipped with thermal cameras, sought to prevent irregular migrants.¹⁶ Indeed, a year after this fence, situated in parallel to the Evros river, was completed, the flow of migrants and refugees crossing the land border reduced. They changed their route by increasingly attempting to reach the Eastern Aegean islands (Angeli, Dimitriadi and Triandafyllidou 2014). In other words, the 2012 fence, the Evros river acting as a natural barrier, together with the Greek-European border control operation “Aspida” (“Shield”) initiated in August 2012, which included the deployment of approximately 1800 border police officers at the Greek-Turkish land border, pushed migrants and refugees to use the Eastern Mediterranean route to reach Europe.

Second, in November 2013, the Bulgarian government announced the construction of a three metre high metal fence with razor wire on its border with Turkey. A year later, the Bulgarian government announced the extension of the already 33-km fence built during the previous year, by a further 130 km.¹⁷ Moreover, the fence is monitored 24 hours a day by around 1,500 border police deployed at strategic points to detect and prevent migrants from crossing the border. These policies seem to have dissuaded migrants from trying to enter Bulgaria from Turkey, since the number of migrants arriving in Bulgaria has decreased from 11,524 in 2013, to 6,023 in 2014.¹⁸

Third, two events in 2015 concerning the Central Mediterranean route might have persuaded Syrian refugees to prefer Turkey rather than Libya as transit state before reaching Europe. On the one hand, the Central Mediterranean route might have become too dangerous in the eyes of Syrian refugees after 900 migrants (mostly Syrian) died on April 19th 2015, when the boat taking them from Libya to Italy sank. On the other hand, the approval by the EU in May 2015 of the EUNAVFOR MED military European mission to fight people traffickers in Libya might also have played a persuasive role. The announcement in the media, that this operation was planning to attack smugglers and traffickers and dismantle their boats, might have influenced the Syrian refugees to switch from the Central Mediterranean route to the Eastern Mediterranean route.¹⁹ As we have seen, while in 2014 almost 41 thousand Syrians arrived in Italy from Libya, this year only 7,000 Syrians arrived in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route.²⁰ Moreover, at the beginning of October the EU Council agreed to move to the second phase of this naval operation, enabling the operation “to board, search, seize and divert

¹⁴ Newsweek (08/10/2014) “Thousands of Syrian Refugees Are Desperate to Escape the Camps That Gave Them Shelter”; IRIN news: (08/01/2015) “A timeline of Syria’s closing borders”.

¹⁵ European Council for Refugees and Exiles (21/11/2014) “Increasing border restrictions preventing civilians from fleeing Syria”.

¹⁶ The Huffington Post (24/09/2015) ” Why Greece Shut The Shortest, Safest Route For Migrants And Refugees”

¹⁷ Reuters (14/01/2015) “Bulgaria to extend fence at Turkish border to bar refugee influx”.

¹⁸ Euronews (01/05/2015) “Is Bulgaria’s border wall forcing migrants to risk deadly crossings?”

¹⁹ The Guardian (22/06/2015) “EU launches naval operation to monitor Libyan people smugglers”; VICE News (22/06/2015) “Europe Launches Naval Operation to 'Attack Smugglers' in Response to Migrant Crisis”

²⁰ El Mundo (18/05/2015) “La UE aprueba la misión militar contra las mafias en Libia”.

vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking on the high seas”.²¹ However many migrants from other countries seem to not have been deterred at all by these control measures since the rhythm of their arrivals has continued at the same pace (see Graph 1 and 3).²²

In sum, this combination of events and restrictive policies has created a funnel effect, cornering and concentrating Syrian refugees in Turkey, by closing, step by step, all the doors by which they could get to Europe and leaving them two options: to stay in Turkey or to take a boat from Turkish shores, avoiding Turkish coast guards, to reach Europe. As I will explain in the next section, after a couple of years in which refugees stayed and found protection in Turkey, several events in 2015 pushed them to opt for the second option.

3.2 A succession of events and Turkish decisions leading migrants and refugees to leave Turkey

The role of Turkey in the current refugee crisis has been largely overlooked, although it has been and still is determinant. This role, however, cannot be understood without taking into account Turkey's geopolitical situation and geostrategic interests in the region.

First, even though countries like Jordan and Lebanon had begun to close their borders since 2014, till the beginning of 2015 Turkey not only followed a policy of open borders for Syrian refugees (and other nationalities) but it also built new refugee camps and strengthened its coordination with agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Solidarity towards refugees has been seen by some experts as a Turkish foreign policy strategy, seeking to gain a good reputation among Syrian refugees and the Arab world, and in turn, a major influence in the region in the near future.²³ In part this explains why the number of registered refugees in Turkish camps went from 1,060,279 in November 2014 to 1,552,839 registered by the end of December 2014, and 1,938,999 in August 2015.²⁴

This million refugees registered in less than a year is also due to other factors of a geopolitical nature. The advance of the Islamic State in the northeast, as well as the fact that some sources maintain that the regime of Al-Assad has gradually lost part of its territory, pushed many Syrian families to flee to Turkey over this year.

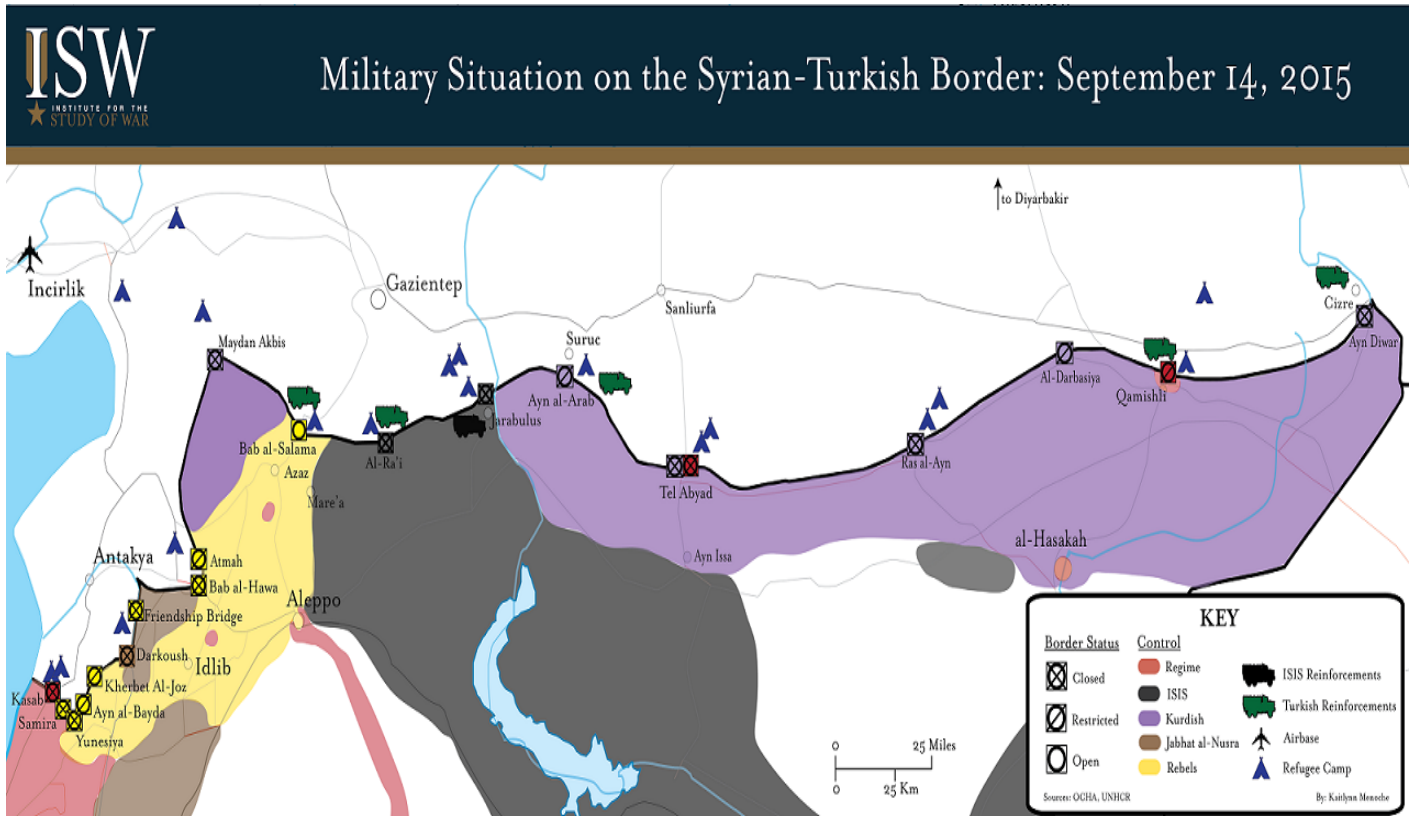
²¹ The European Council (28/09/2015) “EUNAVFOR Med: EU agrees to start the active phase of the operation against human smugglers and to rename it "Operation Sophia”

²² Missing Migrants Project of the International Organization for Migration.

²³ Kemal Kirisci and Raj Salooja (2014) “How Turkey Can Integrate Syrian Refugees”, Northern Exodus.

²⁴ See UNCHR Syria Regional Refugee Response (Turkey).

**Map 1:
Military situation, Status of Border Crossings and Refugee Camps at the Syrian-Turkish Border**



Source: Institute for the Study of War (14/09/2015)

However, during the year 2015 the Turkish government progressively switched its open border policy and most of the border crossings were closed. In March 2015 the Turkish government decided to close the Bab al-Salama border crossing.²⁵ Moreover, in order to prevent Syrian refugees from getting into Turkish territory the Turkish border guards did not hesitate to open fire against Syrian civilians attempting to cross into Turkey through the western areas of Sere Kaniye (Ras al-Ain) city, killing at least eight people at the beginning of June.²⁶ This Turkish fortification strategy, together with the advance of the Islamic State in Syria, has reduced during 2015 the territory and border crossings from where Syrian refugees might have a chance to leave the country and get into Turkey (see Map 1).²⁷

However, it was from the 20th of July 2015 that a succession of events in Turkey and decisions made by the Turkish government were to trigger the current refugee crisis and the uncontrollable flow that started to arrive in Greece from Turkey, from the 9th to the 14th of August (see graphs 1 and 2). These events and decisions were going to affect, directly or indirectly, not only the situation of migrants in Turkey and Syria, but also the domestic and geopolitical context of Turkey, which in turn was going to have an effect too on migration flows (see graphs 1 and 4).

A series of terrorist attacks on Turkish soil persuaded Turkey to change its involvement and position regarding the Syrian conflict. On July 20, 32 people were killed and over 100 suffered injuries in Suruç, a Turkish village which borders Syria, as a result of a suicide bombing carried out by an

²⁵ Al-Monitor (06/03/2015) “No sign of Turkey-Syria border reopening”

²⁶ ARA News (03/06/2015) “Turkish border guards kill eight Syrians for trying to cross illegally”

²⁷ Huffington Post (14/08/2015) “Turkey Builds Wall In Token Effort To Secure Border With Syria”

Islamic State member.²⁸ A few days after, one Turkish soldier was killed when Islamic State militiamen attacked a Turkish border post. As a consequence, the Turkish government took three key decisions that show its increasing involvement regarding the Syrian conflict.

First, the Turkish government mobilized about 5.000 soldiers, aviation, tanks and artillery in order to besiege Islamic State's positions in the regions bordering Syria. Second, after having long refused to lend military facilities to the US-led coalition against ISIS, Turkey promptly changed its position after these terrorist attacks and agreed to let the US use the Incirlik air base, among others (see Map 2).²⁹

Map 2: Turkish Airbases Opened to US-led Coalition (August 2015)



Source: Institute of Studies of War

Finally, on the 23rd of July the Turkish government agreed to reinforce the Turkish-Syrian border with a “modular wall” about 150km long, including wire fencing and extra ditches.³⁰ This decision was made to prevent ISIS fighters from crossing the border; however it is obvious that these measures were also going to make it more difficult for Syrian refugees to flee their country.

These events were going to aggravate even further in the following weeks both the social and political instability in Turkey and the situation and living conditions of refugees and migrants in Turkey.

The terrorist attack in Suruç provoked violent demonstrations in several regions of Turkey, including one in Istanbul in which a policeman was killed. Several Kurds were killed in the Suruç bombing, enraging the Kurdish minority, who accused the Turkish government of strategically backing the Islamic State militia in Syria against Kurdish forces. Two Turkish police officers were killed by Kurdish militants and a Turkish military base was attacked by PKK militiamen in retaliation for the bombing.³¹ As a result of the violent demonstrations, the Turkish Interior Ministry restricted

²⁸ The Guardian (20/07/2015) “Isis suicide bomber' strikes Turkish border town as Syrian war spills over”

²⁹ The Guardian (23/07/2015) “Turkey to let anti-Isis coalition use airbase after soldier's death”

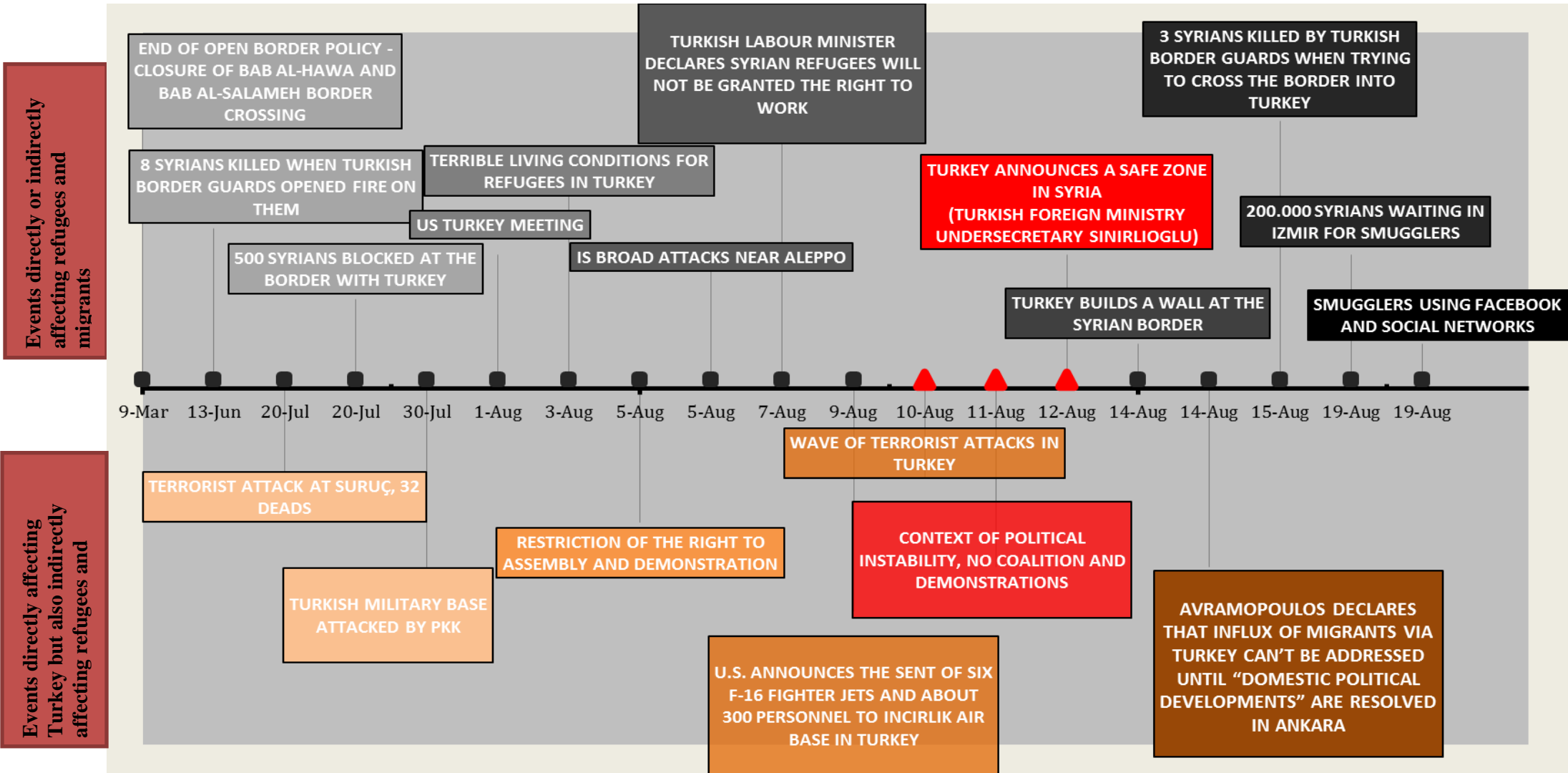
³⁰ The Guardian (23/07/2015) “Turkey reinforces border with Syria in wake of suspected suicide attack”

³¹ New Eastern Outlook (02/08/2015) “Turkish authorities offer a unique response to Islamic attacks”.

the right to assembly and demonstration by granting the governors and district governors the powers to cancel any meeting or demonstration on the grounds of posing a risk to public order.³²

³² Hurryet Daily News (05/08/2015) “New decree to restrict use of assembly and demonstration rights in Turkey”; BGN News (07/08/2015) “Turkish government further restricts laws surrounding demonstrations”.

Graph 4: Chronology of the succession of push factors triggering the refugee crisis of August 2015



Source: own elaboration

It is important to remember that in June 2015, Erdogan's Islamist right wing Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its majority in the elections for the first time in 13 years, as votes for a progressive Kurdish-led party soared, and after weeks of failed negotiations, on the 21st of August Erdogan announced snap elections for the 1st of November.³³ All together this illustrates the level of instability experienced in Turkey at the beginning of August.

Moreover, while Turkey agreed to let the US use its military bases, during the first week of August there was much speculation that in exchange for its cooperation, the US had agreed to establish a safe zone in northern Syria. This zone, it was suggested, would be safe in that it would be cleared of IS, Syrian regime forces and fighters of the Kurdish militia (see Map 3).³⁴ However, the Turkish government insisted several times that the zone was going to be used to send back Syrian refugees to their country. As Turkey's Foreign Minister, Mevlü Çavuşğlu, stressed: "When areas in northern Syria are cleared of the [ISIS] threat, the safe zones will be filled naturally.... People who have been displaced can be placed in those safe areas."³⁵ As several members of Human Rights Watch have pointed out, this safe zone is reminiscent of the tragic United Nations resolution 819 of 1993, agreeing to establish Srebrenica and its surroundings as a "safe area" free from armed attack or any other hostile act.³⁶

The US has denied the creation of this safe-zone, even though on the 12th of August the Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu announced that Turkey and the United States had agreed on the terms to establish a "safe zone" in northern Syria. According to Sinirlioglu, the safe zone would stretch over 98 kilometers (61 miles) in length and 45 kilometers (28 miles) in width in the north of Syria.³⁷

This announcement might not have been the actual trigger for the uncontrollable increase of arrivals of migrants from Turkish coasts from the 9th to the 14th of August 2015, but most likely it was one of the factors pushing Syrian refugees to leave Turkey. It is highly likely that 2 million refugees, who had fled their country to escape from war and the advance of Islamic State, were not willing to be sent to an area within Syrian territory that currently is still controlled by Islamic State. Moreover, as several journalists and also Melissa Fleming, Spokesperson at UNHCR,³⁸ have pointed out, "Syrians inside and outside the country avidly follow the news (...). Many also fear the gates will close soon and the only time to travel is now".³⁹

In addition, from the 5th to the 10th of August 2015 several events explain this huge increase. During this period, these events led to the intersection of two trends: namely on the one hand the

³³ Aljazeera (21/08/2015) "Erdogan says Turkey to hold snap election on November 1".

³⁴ Al-Monitor (01/10/2015) "IS intensifies attacks outside Aleppo"

³⁵ Frelik, B. (21/08/2015) "Safe zones name only" *Human Rights Watch*.

³⁶ The Srebrenica massacre was the killing, in July 1995, of more than 8,000 Muslim Bosniacs in the town of Srebrenica during the Balkan War. In April 1993, the United Nations declared Srebrenica a "safe area" under UN protection, but in July 1995, the UNPROFOR's Dutch soldiers in Srebrenica failed to prevent the massacre.

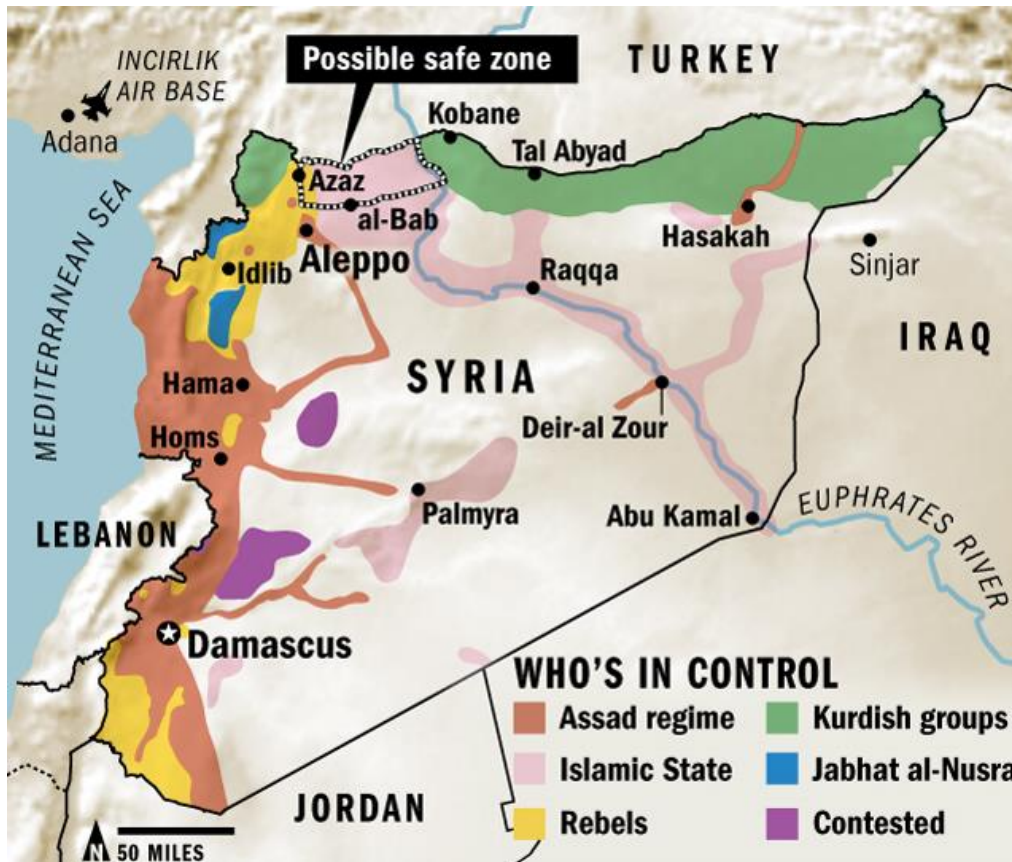
³⁷ Al-Monitor (25/08/2015) "Is Nusra cooperating with Syrian opposition to support establishing safe zone on Syria-Turkey border?"

³⁸ Melissa Fleming in The Guardian (25/10/2015) "Six reasons why Syrians are fleeing to Europe in increasing numbers".

³⁹ In further research it could be very interesting to study to what extent the use of smartphones by refugees has helped them to reach Europe. Many journalist have written about the fact that thanks to their cellphones, refugees are permanently informed of what is happening in their home country, but also in Europe and Turkey. After the importance of social networks during the Arab Spring revolts, it could be possible that cellphones and social networks might play an unprecedented role in the current refugee crisis. See BBC (07/09/2015) "The 'vital' role of mobile phones for refugees and migrants"; CNBC (11/09/2015) "How smartphones are helping refugees in Europe"; Handelsblatt (25/09/2015) "Clinging to a Smartphone Lifeline"; CNN (15/09/2015) "Facebook refugees' chart escape from Syria on cell phones"

Turkish willingness and capacity to continue receiving, protecting and controlling Syrian refugees and, on the other hand, the motivation of Syrian refugees to leave Turkey to reach Europe (see Graph 4).

Map 3: Possible Safe Zone and Military Situation in Syria in August 2015



Source: Institute of Studies of War and Washington Post

First of all, on the 7th of August, the Turkish Minister of Labour confirmed that Turkey was not going to offer special work permits to Syrian refugees.⁴⁰ It is important to remember that the 2 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey do not actually have official refugee status. Instead, the Turkish government labelled them as *misafir* (literally, ‘guests’) and granted them temporary protection. In other words, Turkey is under no obligation to provide support for Syrians, and can send them back whenever it wants (Fitzherbert 2015). Turkey maintains a geographical limitation clause which allows it to consider exclusively asylum applications of people from European countries (Içduygu 2015). This clause disqualifies, therefore, a vast number of asylum seekers and refugees coming from conflicts such as Syria. Syrian refugees are not granted refugee status but instead a “temporary protection” which was formalized in April 2013 with the newly passed Law on Foreigners and International Protection.⁴¹ This Law ensured full basic services for Syrians in the camps, but limited services, healthcare and right to work for those outside them.

⁴⁰ Reuters (07/08/2015) “Turkey will not give Syrian refugees right to work - labour minister”

⁴¹ See Içduygu (2015) and Law No. 6458 of 4 April 2013. See also ACNUR (12/04/2013): “ACNUR da la bienvenida a la nueva ley de asilo en Turquía”. It is important to take into account that this Law began to be negotiated in 2005, during the EU-Turkish accession talks that led to the adoption of the *Action Plan on Asylum and Migration* on 7, January 2005 (Soykan 2012).

However, the fact that Syrians cannot get work permits explains why many Syrians are working illegally, accepting lower wages. This situation has not only led to the exploitation of Syrians in Turkey (including women and children), but it has also resulted in animosity, abuse, resentment and violence from the local Turkish population (Kirisçi and Ferris 2015).⁴² In many cities and towns in Turkey, tension is rising because in certain cases the Syrian population has increased to such an extent that it is even higher than the local Turkish population. In other cases, Syrians have been accused by the Turkish authorities of causing disturbances or affecting tourism.⁴³ It is important to remember that only around 300,000 Syrian refugees live in Turkish camps, which means that at least 1.7 million Syrians live in other towns and cities in Turkey, sometimes surviving in parks and squares, hoping to find jobs, or constantly arriving in Bodrum and Izmir looking for smugglers to take them to Europe.

Second, many Syrian refugees have realized that the war in Syria is not close to an end: quite the opposite. The Turkish-US agreements, the increasing involvement of Turkey in the conflict, the continuous support of Russia to the Al-Assad regime and the advance of ISIS to the Turkish-Syrian border, have together persuaded Syrian refugees that the end of the war is far away, and that to go to Europe is the only option, to live a life of dignity.

Third, the Turkish situation has changed due to the increasing political instability and terrorist attacks. On the 10th of August, two women shot at the U.S. consulate in Istanbul and at least nine people were killed in a wave of separate attacks on Turkish security forces, including a bomb explosion at a police station. These attacks took place as a result of the Turkish government decision to launch a crackdown on Islamic State, Kurdish and far-left militants.⁴⁴ Moreover, the fact that during this week of terrorist attacks the parties negotiating the creation of a government failed to reach an agreement most likely created even more instability and lack of coordination, at the time when new waves of refugees were travelling to Izmir or Bodrum to take boats towards Europe.

Finally a last factor may have had a significant effect: the increasing number of smugglers and traffickers taking advantage of the situation. With the unstable political situation in Turkey, with all the fears around the Syrian-Turkish border, the Turkish security forces have focused all their attention and resources on the fight against terrorism. This explains why refugees had rather better chances of crossing Turkish territory to the western Turkish coasts. At the same time, the smuggling and trafficking business has seen the Eastern Mediterranean route opened up widely; this explains why many tourist stores in Turkey display life-jackets or rubber boats in their shop windows, like any other common tourist product⁴⁵ or why smugglers and traffickers have even advertised their business on social networks.⁴⁶ Indeed, in September 2015 France's Channel 2 claimed that a French honorary consul in Bodrum (Turkey) was helping with the traffic of refugees by sea, and that apparently the municipality and governor of the region were participating too.⁴⁷ Altogether this has led many refugees and migrants from various countries to take advantage of the situation, to attempt to reach Europe.

⁴² Breitbart (19/06/2015) "New Refugee law keep Syrian refugees in limbo"; CBS News (22/09/2015) "Refugee children forced into labour in Turkey"; The Guardian (20/11/2014) "Amnesty report reveals desperate plight of Syrian refugees in Turkey".

⁴³ Hurryet Daily News (26/05/2015) "Syrians bussed out of Turkish resort as tourism season looms"

⁴⁴ The World Street Journal (10/08/2015): "Spate of Attacks Across Turkey Kills 6"; BBC (10/08/2015) "Turkey attacks: deadly violence in Istanbul and Sirmak"; Aljazeera (12/08/2015) "Turkey's summer of mayhem"; Reuters (10/08/2015) "U.S. consulate in Turkey targeted as wave of attacks kills 9".

⁴⁵ The Guardian (24/09/2015) "Lifejackets going cheap: people smugglers of Izmir, Turkey, predict drop in business"; BBC (28/08/2015) "Europe migrants' life-jacket capital"

⁴⁶ The use of Facebook: International Business Times (11/08/2015) "Greece migrant crisis: 200,000 'ready to cross' Aegean Sea from Turkey"

⁴⁷ France 24 (12/09/2015) "French honorary consul in Turkey suspended over selling rubber dinghies to migrants"

In sum, the increase in the arrivals from Turkish shores from the 9th to the 14th of August 2015 can be explained by the convergence of several factors, but above all by the intersection of two distinct trends: on the one hand, the decrease of Turkish interest and/or capacity to keep giving assistance to Syrian refugees in its territory, and on the other hand the increase of push-factors motivating Syrian refugees to leave Turkey for Europe. Therefore it is most likely that both the Turkish Government's and Syrian refugees' position reached their tipping point (Gladwell 2000) or threshold (Granovetter 1978) due to the events taking place especially between the 9th and the 14th of August 2015 (see Graph 4).⁴⁸ The intersection of both positions and interests during these days led to a situation in which a massive number of Syrian refugees decided to leave Turkey, at the same time that Turkey was no longer interested in receiving and controlling Syrian refugees within its territory.

4. Turkey and the refugee crisis: A crossroads for the European Union

The current refugee crisis has revealed a clear fact: the EU and the Member States are powerless to deal with the situation, and dependent on Turkey to stem migration flows. This EU powerlessness was evident when shortly after the exponential increase of refugees arriving on Greek shores (the 14th of August), the European Commissioner for Migration Dimitris Avramopoulos said: "Turkey is crossing a turbulent political zone right now... We are waiting to see the outcome of the domestic political developments in order to go there and address this issue with the competent Turkish authorities."⁴⁹ In other words, Turkey refused the EU demands to increase its resources and cooperation on migration control.

It is hard not to suspect malice that Turkey might have used the refugee crisis strategically to get higher leverage power, as other countries have done in the past (Bensaad 2004; Greenhill 2010; Cassarino 2010; Paoletti 2011; Sanchez-Montijano and Zaragoza-Cristiani 2013; Del Sarto 2015; Del Sarto and Steindler 2015). However, it is hard to prove that Turkey pushed or even helped refugees to get into Europe since we have seen that Turkey continued to control and arrest thousands of migrants in August and September.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding, in a context in which a transit state (such as Turkey) manages to control its maritime borders with, say, X coast guard patrols to stop hypothetically about 20,000 irregular migrants waiting to sail to Europe, and in which this number increases dramatically in a short time to 200.000 refugees,⁵¹ it is also true that it will be necessary to increase the number of X patrols in proportion to those numbers. Otherwise, a massive and uncontrollable influx of people will take place: which was the case here.

There is one thing sure: whether or not Turkey prevents refugees from reaching Europe, the massive arrival of people in Europe benefits the Turkish position and it has increased its negotiation leverage over the EU and its member states (Del Sarto 2015, 10) in at least two dimensions.

⁴⁸ The analysis of both the Turkish government and the Syrian refugees' decisions with respect to the theories of Granovetter and Gladwell needs and deserves to be developed in further research. In other words, it will be necessary to demonstrate (maybe through interviews) that the events described previously and in Graph 4 caused the Turkish Government's and the Syrian refugees' positions to reach their tipping point or threshold between the 9th and the 14th of August 2015.

⁴⁹ Anadolu Agency (14/08/2015) "EU eye Turkey 'developments' amid migrant crisis"

⁵⁰ The Arab Weekly (09/08/2015) "Syrian refugees try crossing from Turkish coast"; Reuters (11/08/2015) "Turkey rescues 330 Greece-bound Syrians amid record surge of refugees"; Daily Sabah (15/08/2015) "Turkish coast guard finds at least 500 Greece-bound migrants"; EFE Agency (12/08/2015) "Turkey relocates Syrian refugees to stadium in Izmir".

⁵¹ Which was the case apparently only counting the number of Syrians in the city of Izmir the 19th August 2015: See Reuters (09/08/2015) "Syrian migrants flock to Turkish city for risky voyage to Europe"

First, the Syrian refugee crisis has drawn all the international attention to the Syrian conflict. This attention coincides with Turkish interests, since Erdogan for a long time has been asking the US and NATO members to take action to overthrow the Al-Assad regime. However, the current massive arrivals have directly transferred the problems and consequences of the Middle East instability to the heart of Europe.⁵² In other words, the massive arrivals have shifted some of the pressure to Europe, and in turn, NATO and EU members will have more pressure to act in Syria. This might explain why Prime Minister Davutoglu has repeatedly stated that the only way to prevent new waves of refugees is to stop atrocities committed by the Syrian regime and the Islamic State group.⁵³

Second, by engaging more intensively in the Syrian conflict (joining the US bombing of Islamic State targets), and by unilaterally assuming the cost of the arrival of more than two million refugees (Turkey has spent more than 7,6 billion dollars providing assistance to refugees),⁵⁴ Turkey has not only gained international clout but also the leverage to negotiate, and refuse to increase its cooperation on migration control.

Indeed, at the time of writing this paper, the EU and Turkey's leaders have recently signed an agreement after meeting on several occasions since the crisis became critical in August 2015. Allegedly, the timing, and the continuous massive arrivals in Greece seem to be to Turkey's advantage, since the EU and its members have been progressively increasing their reward/carrot to persuade it to cooperate.

While in August 2015 the EU leaders seemed to be powerless to do anything but to wait the outcome of political developments in Turkey, in September they suddenly started to appear nervous, the European Commission agreeing to deliver 1 billion euros to Turkey to help it in assisting Syrian refugees.⁵⁵ However, as we see in Graph 1, this EU concrete pledge of support did not seem to convince Turkish officials, since the huge numbers of refugees continued to arrive from Turkey. This explains why the EU increased its offer again in October, to persuade Turkey to cooperate on the control of migration flows.

In October 2015, a succession of meetings between EU and Turkish leaders seems to have led to a deal between the two sides. At the beginning of October the Turkish President Erdogan considered the initial EU aid to be insufficient,⁵⁶ after meeting in Brussels the presidents of the three main EU bodies: the European Council's Donald Tusk, the European Commission's Jean-Claude Juncker, and the European Parliament's Martin Schulz.⁵⁷ The Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister F. Sinirlioglu even qualified the first deal as "unacceptable" and as "political bribery".⁵⁸

In response to this, and because of the growing anxiety of EU leaders about controlling the arrivals, an unprecedented and ambitious offer was made by the EU a few weeks later. This EU Action Plan, which was supported by Angela Merkel in her visit to Istanbul on the 18th of October, consisted in offering, first of all, more than three billion euros to support Turkey in hosting over two million refugees.⁵⁹ Second, Turkey would be included on the new EU "safe countries of origin list".⁶⁰ Some

⁵² Al-Monitor (17/09/2015) "How Erdogan exploits Syrian refugees"

⁵³ The Associated Press Big Story (28/09/2015) "Turkey urges renewed global efforts to stem refugee wave"

⁵⁴ Foreign Policy (28/09/2015) "Turkey and Jordan to EU: Our Refugee Problem Is Bigger than Yours"; and also see Ferris and Kirisci (08/07/2015) "What Turkey's open-door policy means for Syrian refugees".

⁵⁵ See Euroactiv (22/09/2015): "EU summit to pledge €1 billion to Turkey"

⁵⁶ See Euroactiv (08/10/2015) "Turkey frowns at EU refugee aid plan".

⁵⁷ See The Independent (05/10/2015) "President Erdogan shames EU with Turkish stance on Syrian refugee crisis"

⁵⁸ See BBC (16/10/2015) "Migrant crisis: EU backs Turkey action plan"; and also Reuters (16/10/2015) "Turkey's EU accession bid not a matter of 'political bribery': AKP spokesman"

⁵⁹ See European Union Delegation to the United Nations (24/11/2015) "EU-Turkey Cooperation: A €3 billion Refugee Facility for Turkey"

human rights associations have already raised the alarm that this would mean that the EU would turn a blind eye to Turkish human rights violations. Third, Turkish citizens wanting to visit Europe would be granted visa-free travel. The EU road map aiming to grant visa-facilitation for Turkish citizens in 2017 would be accelerated to 2016. Four, the accession discussions to admit Turkey as EU member would be reopened.⁶¹ In this sense, five chapters in Turkey's EU membership negotiations would be unblocked: on monetary policy, justice, fundamental rights, energy and education.

In exchange, the EU requested Turkey to give to all refugees the right to work and access to public services, to no longer treat Syrian refugees as guests with just temporary protection but to grant them with full refugee status, to increase the capacity and numbers of the Turkish coast guards to intercept migrants and refugees heading towards the Greek shores, and to fight and stem the smuggling and trafficking networks operating on both Turkish coasts and soil. Moreover, the EU requested Turkey to implement the previously drafted EU-Turkey readmission deal, stating that Turkey would take back those irregular migrants and refugees who had entered the EU from its territory. This has not yet been signed, and the Turkish Prime Minister Davutoglu insisting several times: "We will not sign the readmission agreement before steps are taken on the Schengen visa and thus a visa liberalization is secured for Turkish citizens."⁶²

It is also important to consider the effects of these negotiations and announcements in the Turkish media in relation to the Turkish elections that took place on the 1st of November 2015. In this sense, not only is it clear that Merkel's declarations two weeks before the elections gave a boost to Erdogan's party, but it is also significant that the European Commission's Turkey Annual Progress Report (planned for October), which emphasized an overall negative trend in the respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights in Turkey, was held back until after the elections.⁶³

Finally, on the 29th of November 2015 the 28 Heads of State or Government of the European Union, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk met with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu: the first time that the EU has ever held a full summit of 28 leaders with another non-member country. In this summit, the EU agreed three important measures. The first was to provide 3 billion euro over two years, for Turkey to fulfill the needs of the Syrian refugees living in the country. Initially Turkey had asked for 3 billion euros per year; however, as French President Francois Hollande explained, the money will be paid out bit by bit as conditions are met, leaving the total payout unclear.⁶⁴ Second, the EU and Turkey have agreed to open the negotiations regarding Turkey's process of accession to the European Union. On the 14th of December the discussions over chapter 17 (economic and monetary policies) will be reopened, while the discussions over further chapters are expected to come in the first three months of 2016. Initially, Ankara had asked to negotiate too over chapters 23 and 24 (judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security) but these two chapters have been blocked since 2009 by Cyprus.⁶⁵

(Contd.) _____

⁶⁰ A country of origin is considered safe and therefore it is presumed that it has a democratic system and generally and consistently no persecution, no torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, no threat of violence, no armed conflict. In other words, it is presumed that a 'safe country of origin' is a country where its own citizens are generally not persecuted. The citizens of these countries will still have the right to claim asylum, but their claims will be fast-tracked, speeding up the asylum processing and dissuading purely economic migrants. A short note: in 2014 around 23% of Turkey's asylum seekers to the EU were accepted.

⁶¹ See Financial Times (16/10/2015) "Merkel backs multi-billion euro refugee package for Turkey"; IRIN News (19/10/2015) "Briefing: The EU refugee deal with Turkey"

⁶² See RT (16/10/2015) "€3bn, visa deal & EU access talks if Turkey stops refugee flow to Europe"

⁶³ Reuters (28/10/2015) "Withheld EU report raps Turkey on rights, media, justice"

⁶⁴ Reuters (30/11/2015) "Declaring 'new beginning,' EU and Turkey seal migrant deal"

⁶⁵ It is also interesting to remember that the 18th of November 2015, the prime ministers of Turkey and Greece met and declared that they saw an opportunity to move toward a solution on the 40-year division of Cyprus. Tsipras also indicated that he would lend support to Ankara's bid to join the European Union. See The Irish Times (18/11/2015) "Turkey and Greece see window of opportunity on Cyprus"

Third, Turkey agreed to implement, as from June 2016, the readmission agreement, and in exchange the EU will lift visa requirements for Turkish citizens in the Schengen zone by October 2016.

Therefore, as we can see, the refugee crisis has led Turkish-EU relations to an unthinkable point, taking into account that three months earlier the EU leaders preferred to distance themselves from Turkey because of Erdogan's increasing authoritarianism. However, the need of EU leaders to stem refugee flows and the effective Turkish strategy of using its new "weapon of mass migration" bargaining chip (Greenhill 2010), have totally changed EU-Turkey relations. In less than two months, not only have the EU-Turkey accession negotiations made more progress than in the previous 15 years, but the framework of interdependence between both sides has made an about-face, Turkey having unprecedented leverage and the EU having an extraordinary vulnerable dependency (Keohane and Nye 2012, 10-11) on Turkey.

5. Conclusion

Today Europe is experiencing the consequences of not only a refugee crisis emanating from Syria but also an extremely unstable and violent context in Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, by fortifying the EU external borders, not supporting and sharing the burden with its neighbouring countries and by having previously refused to accept a larger number of refugees, the European Union and its Member States have indirectly provoked exactly what they have been trying to avoid for years: a massive and uncontrollable influx of refugees.

In this paper, I have sought to explain the causes of the massive migratory flows from Turkey to Greece since August 2015. The context of conflict and regional turbulence in the Middle East, as well as the restrictive policies of the EU and the Syrian neighbouring countries, caused a funnel effect, cornering and concentrating a significant number of Syrian refugees in Turkey. This concentration, together with several events taking place at the beginning of 2015, in which Turkey was directly or indirectly involved, triggered in August the unprecedented refugee crisis that we are still witnessing today. These events led to a sea change, in the period of the 9th to the 14th of August, in the Turkish position towards refugees and in the Syrian refugees' willingness to wait in Turkey till the end of the war in Syria. The intersection, during these days, between Turkey's decreasing interest in receiving and controlling Syrian refugees within its territories and the increasing motivation of a significant number of Syrian refugees to leave Turkey, sparked the beginning of the current refugee crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean route. Finally, as I have argued, this refugee crisis has accelerated the EU-Turkey accession negotiations in an unprecedented way, and at the same time has increased the leverage power of Turkey. In this sense, the events in the next months and years will be extremely interesting to follow. While the EU has frequently used migration control in the past as an excuse and condition to block or delay the accession of new member candidates (such as Romania, Bulgaria, and even Turkey till very recently), we might be witnessing the first case in which the EU is willing to speed up the accession negotiation with a new member solely because of its desperate need to stem massive refugee numbers and irregular migration flows.

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