

The European Union, Migrants and Refugees

Since the world is commemorating the 400th anniversary of the birth of Shakespeare it was not surprising that Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission should, on April 23, 2016, quote the Bard of Avon. Timmermans, together with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Donald Tusk, President of the EU Council, was in southern Turkey to inaugurate the new EU aid program for Syrians in the country.

Visiting a new refugee camp near the Turkish-Syrian border, before visiting a child protection center, Timmermans, correctly, quoted Portia's speech on mercy in the *Merchant of Venice*, "It blesses the one that gives and it blesses the one who takes," but he was incorrect in his conclusion that "in that sense the Turkish people are really blessed."

Contrary to the tribute of Timmermans, the Turkish people are not blessed, nor can its present rulers be greeted with rapture. By his remark he was reinforcing the blunder that the EU had made on March 18, 2016 in reaching an agreement with Turkey on the difficult migrant issue. The EU has agreed to give Turkey 6 billion euros over the next few years in return for Turkey readmitting all "irregular migrants," asylum seekers deported from Turkey to Greece. For its part, the EU agrees that for each Syrian returned to Turkey, the EU has promised to resettle a Syrian migrant in the EU.

In 2015, more than 850,000 migrants entered Europe from Turkey, most of them interested in going to Germany. The EU hopes the number in 2016 will be reduced.

But for the EU the agreement is less an equitable arrangement than acquiescence in political blackmail. Already disbursement of the promised money for Turkey has started. Now, the EU has

to deal with its promises both to loosen the visa restriction for the 75 million Turks wanting to visit the EU, and to accelerate negotiations over Turkey's ambition to become a member of EU.

The Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, has insisted that this visa liberalization for Turks is a precondition for Turkish agreement to readmit migrants, and that the process of providing access for Turks to enter the Schengen passport free zone must be completed by June 2016. If this is not done he said, "no one can expect Turkey to adhere to its commitments." Apart from his undiplomatic behavior, Davutoglu ignored the fact that a number of problems remain, such as security chips in passports, efficient border patrols, and ending discrimination by Turkey against minority groups.

The EU should have been more careful for at least two reasons: whether Turkey will abide by the number of migrants it is supposed to readmit; and Turkish undemocratic and authoritarian behavior. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on April 20, 2016 issued a report doubting that Turkey can satisfy the EU's strict laws for the return of asylum seekers. The rapporteur of the report, Tineke Strick, a Dutch politician, said that the agreement raises many serious questions of Turkey's compatibility with basic norms on the rights of migrants and refugees.

Questions have long been raised about Turkey's actions. It has been dealing severely with political opponents. It has been supplying arms to Syrian rebels. It has been treating poorly most of the 2.7 million Syrians it has been housing since the civil war began in Syria five years ago. Most of the Syrians there live in poverty, being unable to find a job, unless they operate on the black market.

According to Amnesty International, some refugees have been sent back to Syria. Turkey has illegally forced thousands to return to Syria. At a rate of about one hundred a day,

refugees have been so sent to Syria since January 2016, even though a state is prohibited from deporting individuals to a war zone. According to Human Rights Watch, there has been an increase in the number of Syrians who have been shot while trying to cross into Turkey which is evidently not a safe country for asylum.

The problem remains. So far in 2016, only 325 have been returned from Greece to Turkey while more than 140,000 migrants arrived by boat into Greece and the Greek islands from Turkey. Turkey has done little to halt the main migrant route into Europe via the Aegean. Greece is home to 54,000 stranded migrants, and there are as many as 10,000 refugees at the Greek-Macedonian border, near the village of Idomeni. The sight is distressing of Macedonian police using tear gas against those trying to break through the fence that was built to prevent people coming from Greece.

The EU is aware of the humanitarian migrant crisis, not only in terms of numbers but also in behavior of some of the migrants. Among the more unpleasant aspects of this are narcotic smuggling and trafficking, including heroin, and crime networks, as well as the entrance of ISIS Jihadists as pretended refugees. The burden on the EU, in finance, logistics, and internal tension among the countries, may become too heavy to bear. Since Turkey is not fully reliable, the burden must be shared and largely carried by the Middle Eastern Arab and Muslim states, especially the wealthy oil states who now have a seat at the international table.

The EU must change its policy in three ways. It should stop disbursing money to Turkey unless Turkey carries out its obligation to readmit migrants. It should not entertain the idea of admitting Turkey to the EU unless it stops its attack on free speech and expression. And it should insist that Turkey end its unacknowledged war against the Kurds and begin to grant them, as a minimum, some form of autonomy or self-determination.

Shakespeare had some words for EU policy: "There is a tide in the affairs of (people) which taken at the flood leads on to fortune."