

Open Letter To All TDs On The European Council Deal With Turkey

Posted On: March 22, 2016

Dear Deputy,

On 22nd March 2016 the Acting Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD, will report to the Dáil on the meeting of the European Council attended by himself and Acting Minister of State, Dara Murphy TD, in Brussels on 17 and 18 March 2016.

As a group of organisations we are seeking your commitment to the following:

- Outlining the concerns about the EU-Turkey deal and the ways in which it will place people at risk and undermine Ireland's commitment to its international obligations
- Ensuring greater participation in the relocation of asylum seekers and resettlement of refugees
- Advocating for an increase in the number of refugees allowed to settle in Ireland

The EU-Turkey deal

We are calling on you, as a newly elected TD in the 32nd Dáil, to take the opportunity in the Dail on Tuesday 22nd March to outline why the EU-Turkey deal, agreed at the [European Council on 17/18 March 2016](#), is unjust and unworkable and will not address the current refugee crisis. The deal will see the return of 'irregular migrants' arriving in Greece from midnight on 20th March 2016 to Turkey. The policy agreed by the European Council will have a huge impact on the lives of very vulnerable people seeking safety in the EU and has potential far reaching consequences for our obligations under international law and risks breaching the fundamental right to seek asylum.

The agreement on 18th March 2016 followed a decision of the European Council on 29th November 2015 to provide €3bn to Turkey to prevent people crossing to Greece. Despite that agreement, [nearly 2000 people continued to make the crossing on a daily basis](#). In addition, [the attempts made by the Turkish authorities to deter people from crossing have been shown to put lives at risk](#).

The deal is premised on the "understanding" no decisions will be taken unless they are fully compliant with EU and international law. Given the current situation in both Greece and Turkey, it is difficult to accept that such statements are grounded in reality. The whole emphasis of the European Council's decision is that of return as opposed to the settlement of refugees who have arrived or will arrive in Greece. It has been estimated that [Greece will require 4000 personnel](#) in order to properly register and accommodate asylum seekers, assess the admissibility and if necessary determine claims for international protection and process appeals against negative decisions and removals. At the time the European Council took the decision on 18th March 2016, an estimated 45,000 people were trapped in Greece, unable to move to other EU countries because of

border closures. The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, has previously estimated that 90% of those arriving in Greece from Turkey are from the top 10 refugee producing countries, including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

There is therefore a real possibility of one of two consequences arising from the EU-Turkey deal on returns to Turkey: either Greece will grant refugee status to the majority of those who have or will arrive in the country or they will be returning *prima facie* refugees to Turkey where they will face an uncertain future. Turkey has not only already accommodated 2.7 million refugees, many without the ability to support themselves, it has also not signed the Protocol to the Refugee Convention and is itself facing challenges to its own security. The agreement to provide resettlement for every Syrian national registered in Turkey for every one returned from Greece itself (“one in, one out”) is alarming and has very little chance of success. The agreement already in place to resettle refugees from Lebanon and Jordan in EU states is already well below target. Furthermore, the emphasis on resettlement from Turkey of those who have not previously entered or attempted to travel to the EU is punitive, undermining the right to seek asylum and exacerbating the trauma which many refugees have already experienced in taking flight and being forced to take perilous journeys.

International organisations have been highly critical of the proposal to enter into this agreement with Turkey. These include [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#) and the [European Council on Refugees and Exiles](#), [Oxfam International](#) and [Medecins Sans Frontieres](#). Given that the plan to return people to and resettle people from Turkey has no real prospect of success, the questionable legality of the deal and the reality that many will continue to travel to and be trapped in Greece, we would welcome an opportunity to work with a joint Oireachtas group on real alternatives to the EU-Turkey deal.

Ireland’s participation in relocation and resettlement schemes

Even if the EU-Turkey deal remains in place, Ireland could and should be doing much more to honour its commitment to previous agreements on relocation and resettlement and increase the number of refugees that it is willing to take.

Ireland opted-in to the European Agenda on Migration and made a voluntary commitment to accept 4000 people, over 1000 of which are due to be resettled from Lebanon and Jordan and just under 3000 from Greece and Italy. To date, according to the information available to us, only 10 people (one family) have been relocated from Greece and less than 300 from Lebanon and Jordan. We would ask you to ensure that the government fulfils the commitments that it entered into in 2015 and increases the rate of relocation and resettlement, particularly given the immense pressures on Greece and the inhumane conditions in some parts of the country. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has recently indicated that the numbers applying for asylum in Greece have increased significantly and many more are now willing to be considered for relocation. Given the inevitable delays in putting resources in place to deal with the new EU-Turkey deal, both relocation and resettlement from Jordan and Turkey can be implemented without delay.

In addition, given the pressures on the countries surrounding Syria, we would ask you to call on the government to increase the available places for resettlement of refugees from outside the EU. By comparison to the population of other EU countries, Ireland has not yet taken an equal proportion of refugees, despite a clear indication from Irish people that refugees are indeed welcome in Ireland.

Ireland will co-host an international conference on the 'migration crisis' at the UN in September 2016. The invitation to co-host with Jordan is an indication of the respect in which Ireland is held in the wider international community. We cannot now undermine our international good standing by not taking a full and active role in the current humanitarian crisis and fail to fully participate in both relocation and resettlement. Thank you for your consideration of this. We look forward to receiving your response.

We trust that you will endeavour to use the debate on Tuesday 22 March 2016 and your presence in the Dáil to raise these concerns and seek Ireland's full and proper participation in resolving the current refugee crisis in a manner that is in full compliance with our international human rights obligations.

Yours faithfully,

Action Aid

Comhlámh

Community Work Ireland

Conference of Religious of Ireland

Cultúr

Doras Luimní

Immigrant Council of Ireland

Irish Missionary Union

Irish Refugee Council

Mercy International Association

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland