



(Sky News, 2017)

Erdoğan Threatens to “Open the Gates to Europe”

9 September, 2019

On September 5th, Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with the provincial heads of the AKP party. During the meeting, Erdoğan accused the European Union (EU) of not upholding their end of a 2016 agreement to assist Turkey in addressing the large influx of Syrian refugees over the past several years. In his statement last week, Erdoğan noted that: “We haven’t been given as much support for the refugees in our country as we expected, especially from the EU and the international community. If this help is not given we may have to open the gates to Europe”, this may have been in hopes of intimidating Europe into fulfilling their deal from 2016. The “2016 EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey” was a long-term solution to end the 2015 migrant crisis, where thousands of migrants were entering Europe’s borders illegally. The deal stated that Turkey would host these refugees and the EU would assist financially and through humanitarian and development projects. The EU promised €6 billion in 2016 to help fund projects that would address concerns over refugee flows from Turkey in to Europe. Since this deal was reached three years ago, less than half of the project has been paid out, which is likely one of the reasons that Erdoğan lashed out and threatened the EU. The project was

supposed to distribute €3 billion in 2016-2017, and the other €3 billion in 2018-2019. As of September 2019, €5.6 billion has been committed to funding the project, as well as €3.5 billion through other projects, however the total amount that has actually been paid out only totals €2.35 billion, according to official EU figures.

The EU may respond to the threats that Erdoğan's words propose and assist in further projects and better funding for refugees in Turkey. A European Commission spokesperson, Natasha Bertaud, responded to Erdoğan's statement noting that the EU has delivered €5.6 billion of the promised amount from the 2016 deal. Despite this statement on the EU's behalf, the numbers from the project outline do not align with her statement. The amount may have been committed to the projects in Turkey, but the funds have not been delivered to assist in carrying out these projects. No other statements have been made regarding the speech by the Turkish president.

Turkey has also not upheld their end of the deal, as it has been forcibly sending Syrian refugees back into warzones controlled by hardline rebels. In fact, these actions that Turkey has taken in recent months put thousands of lives at risk, as many have died in Syria after being forcibly removed from Turkey. Human Rights Watch has noted that this is illegal under humanitarian law, and advocated for the immediate end to the deportations. Last month, a Syrian was killed by Turkish border guards last after trying to cross back into Turkey after being forcibly removed from his home in Istanbul the previous week. Examples like these, and changing Turkish policies on Syrian refugees, and refugees more broadly, may impact the integrity of the agreement between Turkey and the EU.

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