

Using Refugees: Angela Merkel's "Turkish Gambit"

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Global Research, October 19, 2015

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

The frontline in Europe's refugee movement is shifting. In some cases, there is more of the same: the Hungarian approach entailing closures, followed by a brief easing and more closures. Closing the border with Croatia saw an inevitable movement towards Slovenia, whose government has now announced restrictions of 2,500 people a day.

Now, the next stage of the refugee problem is coming to the fore: their use as bargaining chips on the European political stage. While Germany cannot be blamed for trying to find some measure of easing the enormous numbers even as other states fudge their obligations, the "keep them away" approach had to come sooner or later. In the absence of any unified policy on refugees in Europe, it is each country to its selfish own.

Even German authorities are hardening in their approach, though it is not a stance favoured by the Merkel government. Police union chief Rainer Wendt expressed his rather forward views in the *Welt am Sonntag* that Germany should get busy building a fence along its border with Austria. "If we close borders this way, Austria will also close its borders with Slovenia, and that's exactly the effect we need." State solidarity, in other words, in the face of refugee desperation.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's approach may well have resisted an approach closing borders – so far. Instead, in the face of considerable disquiet within her own ranks, she has hit upon another approach: keeping the problem closer to the source by bribing Turkey.

This, it would seem, is Ankara's moment: a key figure in the European security stakes; an eager participant in talks gaining accession to the European Union; and a meddler in the Syrian conflict keen in removing the Assad regime.

Merkel's suggestion is that Turkey's integration into the EU can be speeded up, using refugee management as a bargaining chip. "How can we organise the accession process more dynamically?" she posed at a press conference in Istanbul. "Germany is ready to open chapter 17 this year, and to make preparations for [chapters] 23 and 24. We can talk about the details."

Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu is certainly keen on driving a hard bargain on this one, pressing for a resolution to the Syrian conflict even as EU talks are set to take place. On Sunday, he stressed the urgency of the talks, given another round of potential refugees stemming from Aleppo. "It is our priority that steps will be taken to prevent an increase of refugees from Aleppo due to the offensive [there] by Iranian militia, Isis and Russian attacks." So far, Ankara's insistence on a northern Syrian "safe zone" has not gotten serious traction.

There are other sweeteners layering the offer. These, for Turkey, had to come, after the

initial rejection coming from its foreign minister, Feridun Sinirlioğlu. On Friday, the words were uncompromising on the scope and value of what was offered. “There is a financial package proposed by the EU and we told them it is unacceptable.”[1]

The tune changed over the weekend, both in terms of the amount offered, and in various other structural adjustments to Turkey’s engagement with Europe. Germany would be insisting on pushing for visa-free travel for Turkish nationals, bringing the timetable forward by a year to July 2016. This argument on mobility is hardly surprising, given Turkey’s own efforts to reform its immigration system to bring it more into line with EU standards.

This has, according to the Migration Policy Institute, “limited Turkish authorities’ capacity to manage the Syrian inflows, and, as a result, management of the crisis was left largely in the hands of national organisations working on the ground, in camps, without larger policy guidance.”[2]

As Merkel revealed over the weekend,

“A working group between Turkey and Germany is carrying out talks on these matters and this group will convene again in the coming days. We can facilitate some of these matters by holding bilateral talks.”[3]

The message from Ankara: expect us to keep refugees in tow, and maintain the current population – but at a substantial price. Turkey has its own staggering refugee presence, with more than 2 million Syrian refugees costing in the order of \$7.5bn since the crisis unfolded. Much of this accrued because of a gamble, that the conflict in Syria would have been resolved over a matter of a few years. Now, with its prolongation, the German offer here will entail \$3.4 bn to assist footing the bill to keep the refugees put.

Andrew Garner, whose research portfolio at Amnesty International comprises Turkey, finds the whole talks unpalatable. “Talks between the EU and Turkey on ‘migration management’ risk putting the rights of refugees a distant second behind border control measures designed to prevent refugees from reaching the EU.”

The picture here remains, as it has been from the start, not one of rights but infringements, not one of duties to assist within international law covenants, but sovereign obligations to protect states from being swamped. And wealthy states bribing not so wealthy ones has become a stock-standard response that reduces refugee problems to matters of financial distribution and bean counting.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes

[1]

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/turkey-rejects-eu-offer-refugee-crisis-151016194610039.html>

[2] <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/syrian-refugees-turkey-long-road-ahead>

[3] <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/merkel-turkey-eu-refugee-crisis-151018173824526.html>

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[Dr. Binoy
Kampmark](#)**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca