

Hospitality gives way to hostility for migrants to Greece

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ATHENS: Five years ago, Greece offered hospitality to a huge wave of migrants at the height of the Syrian civil war – but today, hostility greets those seeking a new life.

Experts put the about-turn largely down to a declining trajectory of global growth as well as crisis fatigue, with the Greek people already having shouldered years of austerity after the financial crisis of a decade ago. Nearly a million refugees made it to Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, just kilometers off the Turkish coastline, in the 2015 exodus, and the majority trekked on to mainland Europe.

Poignant images of local mothers on the island of Lesbos feeding migrant babies went round the world.

The following year, a group of local people from the same island found themselves proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize for their humanitarian efforts. But after Turkey last week gave migrants the green light to head for Europe, feelings have changed on an island that already hosts thousands of migrants from the last wave.

Last time round, “people hoped that the leftist government of Alexis Tsipras, with his humane view on refugees, was going to halt austerity,” Filippa Chatzistavrou, professor of political science at Athens University, told AFP. Instead, Greece’s economic woes continued.

Today, Chatzistavrou says, many Greeks are still trying to find their feet in an increasingly extreme political environment.

Kostas Filis, director of Greece’s Institute for International Relations, said the first migration wave was “spontaneous” as people fled Syria and Daesh.

“Today, Turkey is behind a very much smaller migrant flux looking to come to Greece,” he says.

Athens sees Ankara’s decision to open the exit gates as “a political weapon,” whose result was to see some 13,000 people congregate inside 48 hours on the border post at Kastanies. For Chatzistavrou, “Turkey, seeking western support (in Syria), is behaving more aggressively and the flux of migrants are collateral, a geopolitical means used to alter the balance of power.”

FASTFACTS

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- **Athens sees Ankara’s decision to open the exit gates as ‘a political weapon.’**

Conservative Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who has taken a hard line on migration since taking office last July, has ramped up the police and military presence along the Evros (Merik in Turkey) river which straddles the border to prevent an “invasion” and counter the “threat.”

Government, media and citizens alike have fallen into a bellicose rhetoric, which aids the cause of “nationalists and the extreme right,” said Filis. The latest wave of arrivals has ramped up feelings on the Greek side of the border: There have been several attacks against NGOs seeking to aid the migrants and also against journalists.

The EU has meanwhile expressed strong support for Greece, which last year once again became the main port of call for asylum-seekers in Europe at a time when conditions are already difficult in overburdened camps holding those who arrived previously.

“In five years, patience has run out and that opens the door to violence and hostile speech,” warned Maria Stratigaki, a professor of social policy at Athens’ Pantion University.

Greece has had to defend itself from criticism from NGOs over decisions to suspend asylum procedures due to Athens’ belief that the latest wave is down to Turkey and not to war.

Government spokesman Stelios Petsas said Greece proved its humanitarian credentials five years ago.

But “the current problem is that Turkey is using people from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Africa to place (Greece) under siege. That’s what we are going to stop. We shall keep the borders shut as long as necessary.”



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Author:

Mon, 2020-03-09 00:23

ANKARA: The new deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan to bring an end to fighting in Syria's rebel-held stronghold Idlib is likely to have repercussions for the Libyan conflict.

The fundamental disagreements between Moscow and Ankara – not only over Syria but also Libya – have yet to be overcome and may again test the limits of the personal ties between the Turkish and Russian leaders.

Turkey's willingness to deliver on its commitments to push the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terror group from the de-escalation zone will be affected by the two countries' frozen conflicts as it is still Moscow's red line in Idlib.

On his way back from Moscow, Erdogan told Turkish journalists that he believed Putin would take positive steps on the issue of the Wagner Group in Libya, without disclosing additional details.

He added that he was waiting for problems to be resolved in Libya similar to those achieved with Putin regarding Idlib in Syria.

In Syria and Libya, Russia and Turkey are backing rival parties. Turkey supports Fayez Al-Serraj's GNA in Tripoli while Russia is backing its rival, Haftar's eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA).

Recently, Erdogan criticized the Russian presence via thousands of Wagner mercenaries in Libya – seen by some as the reason why Turkish-backed opposition fighters from Idlib were sent to the Libyan battleground as retaliation in this battle for regional primacy.

However, in mid-January, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that jihadists were moving from Idlib to Libya to destabilize the North African country.

"Russia considers all armed groups in Idlib as terrorists and this approach also reflects on the Libyan battleground in terms of the Turkey-backed Syrian fighters who were sent there," said Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based Middle East expert.

"Before initiating a political settlement in Libya, Putin would do his utmost to eradicate jihadists in Libya as he aimed to in Idlib," he told Arab News. According to Sezer, the cease-fire deal between Turkey and Russia requires cooperation between the two countries against terror groups in Idlib, but also in Libya.

"As long as Turkey doesn't want to break ties with Russia, it would take steps for revising its policy in Libya as well because Russia doesn't seem to be tolerant of any commitment that is unfulfilled in terms of fighting

terrorism in the region,” he said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) claimed that 6,650 Syrian mercenaries voluntarily went to Libya, mainly from the divisions of Al-Mu'tasim, Sultan Murad, Suqur Al-Shamal Brigade, Al-Hamzat and Suleiman Shah.

According to Samuel Ramani, a Middle East analyst at the University of Oxford, the Idlib deal is a temporary fix and is unlikely to result in a de-escalation in Libya.

“Putin’s message was that the Russia-Turkey relationship can survive even if both countries disagree on how to handle conflicts, and that applies to Libya too,” he told Arab News.

Ramani thinks that the biggest red line for Russia would not be Turkey adjusting the balance of power in Libya but Ankara’s potential targeting of Russian Wagner Group mercenaries.

“Ultimately Turkey can de-escalate in Libya. Its venture in support of the GNA is an uphill struggle, and Turkish involvement in Libya is a lot less popular than in Syria. So more Turkish casualties could lead to Ankara brokering a settlement with Moscow out of necessity on Libya,” he said.



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Egypt reports death of German national, its first from coronavirus

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Sun, 2020-03-08 14:28

LUXOR: A 60-year-old German tourist has died in Egypt, becoming its first fatality from the new coronavirus, the health ministry in Cairo announced on Sunday.

The man was taken to hospital with fever after arriving in Hurghada from Luxor on March 6, and was placed in intensive care but refused to be transferred to a designated isolation hospital, the ministry said.

Egyptian crew and foreign passengers on a Nile cruise ship on which 45 suspected novel coronavirus cases had been detected disembarked Sunday in the southern city of Luxor.

The health ministry has said the 45 would be quarantined even though 11 of them had tested negative in follow-up tests.

The "A Sara" docked in Luxor days after authorities were alerted that a foreign tourist who had previously disembarked had contracted the virus and infected others onboard.

On Saturday, Health Minister Hala Zayed said 33 people on the ship had tested positive without showing any symptoms.

The health ministry had initially said Friday that another dozen asymptomatic crew had tested positive, but Zayed then said another round of testing had indicated 11 were negative.

She said the 11 would "be isolated for a 14-day follow up" while the 34 positive cases would be kept in an isolation hospital.

The boat was carrying 171 people – 101 foreigners and 70 Egyptian crew – Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli said Saturday.

He did not specify the foreigners' nationalities but said their respective embassies had been contacted.

It was not immediately clear where the other 126 passengers and crew went after disembarking.

On Sunday, Zayed and other officials traveled to Luxor to follow up on quarantine procedures at the city's airport as part of Egypt's response to the virus, a government statement said.

The city of Luxor, home to some of Egypt's most spectacular monuments, is among the country's top tourist draws.

Besides the cruise ship cases, Egypt has detected three cases of the virus, the first of which was announced on February 14.

The health ministry said last week that the first patient, a Chinese national, had recovered and been released.

The other two cases, a Canadian working in an oil company and an Egyptian who

returned from Serbia through France, were still undergoing treatment, according to the ministry.





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Saudi Arabia announces 4 new coronavirus cases

[Jordan princess flies high with fighter pilot first](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-03-08 00:57

AMMAN: Earlier this year, Princess Salma bint Abdullah II of Jordan became the first Jordanian woman to complete preliminary pilot training on fixed-wing aircraft. She was presented with her wings by her father, King Abdullah, Supreme Commander of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army at a ceremony attended by Queen Rania Al-Abdullah and Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II in January.

Salma Nims, secretary-general of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, told Arab News that Jordan has long placed importance on women serving in the military and police.

"Jordan is considered one of the top three countries active in peacemaking since 2007," Nims said. "We have huge international support and national

commitment – including with NATO and with Norway and Canada and Australia – to increase the number of women in this sector.”

Nims explained that supporting the role of women in the military doesn't mean that Jordan is automatically in favor of instigating military action. “It is not about being pro-war. It is about building peace,” she said. “We participate in UN peacekeeping military missions to safeguard women and children.”

Nims believes that women in the military, including Princess Salma – who graduated from a short course at the UK's Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in November 2018 – help break down gender stereotypes of women as the weaker sex.

Princess Salma's brother Crown Prince Hussein, a first lieutenant in the Jordanian Armed Forces, took to Instagram to congratulate his sister.

“Brilliant and hard-working as always,” he wrote. “Congrats on receiving your wings and here's to more success and achievements.”



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Women make their presence felt in new Lebanon cabinet
Wide-ranging social reforms have put Saudi women in the driving seat

Women make their presence felt in new Lebanon cabinet

Sun, 2020-03-08 00:06

BEIRUT: Fifty days ago, six women were nominated to one third of government portfolios in a political and economic situation that no Lebanese politician would be envied for.

Six women holding bachelor and doctorate degrees in management, law, engineering, social sciences, law, political science and French literature were appointed to six ministries: Defense, justice, media, employment, youth and sports, and the displaced. These women had never held political positions before, but were chosen by the main political parties.

The number of women ministers is a record for Lebanon.

The new government saw the appointment of Zeina Akar as the first Lebanese and Arab woman deputy prime minister and minister of defense.

So does Prime Minister Hassan Diab's insistence on the appointment of a large number of women in his government represent changing attitudes toward the role of women in Lebanese society?

Former head of the Lebanese Council of Women and women's rights activist, Iqbal Doughan, told Arab News that the appointment of the women ministers was the result of 50 years of struggle, and that the international agreements on women's rights that Lebanon adhered to have boosted the status of Lebanese women.

"Politicians in Lebanon want to show the international community that they are implementing what they have signed on, and they may have done so under pressure, but the aspiration of women is not limited to this. We want to reach parity between men and women in government appointments based on competence," Doughan said.

She added: "The empowerment of Lebanese women is still deficient," and that, "a change in prevailing laws, minds and mindset is required."

"We saw revolutionary women in the protests that invaded Lebanese streets. We were at the forefront and were the engines of the revolution, yet we fear that once the objectives are achieved, women will be put back home, after having been part of the achievements," she said.

Iman Abdel Nabi Ballout, a student of higher education at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the Lebanese University, pointed out in research published in "Awraq Thaqafiyyah" (Cultural Papers), the magazine of the School of Arts and Humanities published in Beirut, that "due to all efforts and transformations that contributed to the endorsement of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the integration of women's rights into human rights mechanisms, the Lebanese Parliament passed a law that permits the government to sign the convention. Yet the Lebanese ratification included a reservation that prevents women having equal rights to men regarding granting citizenship to their children and her eligibility to custody of her children, which constitutes an obstacle to guaranteeing full dignity and rights of women."

Discrimination against women in the workplace represents another obstacle.

According to Ballout there is "discrimination in wages between women and men who do similar work, delayed promotion of women and not allowing them to reach top administrative positions in private and public institutions, denying married women or mothers the opportunity to work in some areas, and discriminating against women in social benefits. The constitution grants equal rights to all Lebanese citizens by a general clause that applies to all citizens, without referring to economic, social and cultural rights."

Ballout believes that "the status of women in Lebanese politics and public affairs remains modest" for reasons including: "The structural male model, the absence of concepts for human resource development, the lack of societal culture, the lack of freedom of political action, and the spread of corruption in politicians."

Among the reforms to empower women, a decision was recently issued by the director general of personal status at the Ministry of Interior that allows divorced Lebanese women to obtain a family registration statement that includes the names of their children. This decision aims to provide women with the right to obtain official documents with full information, whatever their family status is.

Randa Yassir, consultant on gender equality in Lebanon told Arab News: "The large and balanced presence of Lebanese women in the current government and the former Hariri government which paved the way for women to take over the ministries of interior and of energy had a positive shocking impact on Lebanon and the Arab world, due to the sensitivity of the ministries headed by women, and some considered it an inspiring experience to break stereotypes not only on the Lebanese level, but also on the Arab level."

Yassir saw that "political activity needs competence and experience, and women and men alike confront the same political and security conditions that they should handle to achieve any success, but women also confront a male mindset that tries to hold them more accountable than men and puts their performance under more supervision and accountability than their male colleagues."



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Empowering Arab women scientists for leadership roles