

Article – MEPs call for de-escalation of migration situation with Turkey



Thousands of migrants and asylum seekers have entered Greece via the Turkish borders since a little more than a week ago Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan broke a 2016 migration pact with the EU by opening his country's frontiers with Europe. Under the deal, the EU promised to pay Turkey €6 billion in return for the country curbing migration flows.

MEPs debated the situation at the Greek-Turkish border and the EU's common response to it with Ylva Johansson, the commissioner responsible for home affairs, and Nikolina Brnjac, representing the Croatian presidency, on Tuesday afternoon in Brussels.

"Over the last few days, we have seen the very dangerous attitude of the president of Turkey using vulnerable people in order to benefit himself and his politics," said Spanish S&D member Iratxe García Pérez .

German EPP member Manfred Weber called for a dialogue to start with Turkey to "de-escalate the situation at the Turkish-Greek border".

Commissioner Johansson agreed: "We must continue our dialogue. We must de-escalate the rhetoric and the increased tension. That involves finding a path forward with Turkey. The lines of communication with Turkey remain open and active."

Some Parliament members said the EU should use the current situation to put a [reform of the common rules on asylum](#) back on the EU's agenda. Others wanted to revise the deal with Turkey.

While acknowledging that "the current situation at our external borders is not acceptable," Council representative Brnjac said: "Our expectation is that Turkey will continue the full implementation of the 2016 joint statement."

Johansson also emphasised that the current EU-Turkey statement remains valid.

"The situation at the European external border towards Turkey is worrying, but I also must say that this is not 2015," the commissioner said, referring to the year [when more than one million asylum seekers and migrants arrived in Europe](#).

"We are much, much better prepared now to manage the situation because we know better what to expect," she said, noting that the EU has reinforced its agencies such as the coast guard agency Frontex, the [European Asylum Support Office](#) and that she sees more willingness to cooperate among member states.

In November 2017 the Parliament adopted a resolution calling for an overhaul of the common rules of asylum, in order to increase the EU's preparedness for receiving migrants and asylum seekers and to ensure greater solidarity and a fairer sharing of responsibility among EU countries.

Last year MEPs also approved a new law [to strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard](#) to ensure a better protection of the EU's external borders.

[Article – Plenary highlights: Coronavirus debate, budget, migration](#)



The plenary session took place in Brussels instead of Strasbourg and was shortened to just one day because of concerns linked to the spread of the coronavirus. [Members debated the outbreak of COVID-19](#) with the European Commission and Council on Tuesday morning, stressing the need to slow down its spread across Europe. They also called for solidarity among EU countries and for funds to research the virus.

In a [debate on the EU February summit](#) that failed to produce an agreement among EU leaders on the EU [long-term budget](#), MEPs criticised the proposal by European Council President Charles Michel as lacking ambition and warned they would not approve a bad deal on EU's funding for the next seven years.

The EU should help Greece manage its border with Turkey, said MEPs in Tuesday's [debate on the current situation](#). Many also said the EU should not repeat the 2015 refugee crisis and must update its common rules on asylum.

At the start of the session on Tuesday, MEPs [welcomed the new Gender Equality Strategy](#), announced recently by the European Commission, but underlined the need for concrete action. "Realising women's rights is not an option, it is a duty and it is possible where there is political will," said Parliament Vice-President Mairead McGuinness.

Other business

This week political group leaders also decided to [revise Parliament's calendar](#) as a precautionary health-related measure. The next plenary will also be shortened and take place on 1-2 April in Brussels, while committee meetings planned for next week have been postponed.

Major action in Romania against thefts from moving trucks



The Hague, 10 March 2020

A major action has been taken against a mainly Romanian criminal network, which has been stealing high-grade goods such as laptops, televisions and mobile phones from driving lorries on motorways. Charges have been pressed against 71 suspects, under the direction of the Romanian authorities, with the support of their counterparts in Spain, France, Finland, Sweden and The Netherlands. Furthermore, 73 houses have been searched, with profits of the thefts amounting to approximately EUR 1.6 million. Eurojust actively supported the judicial cooperation and coordination in this case. Europol provided analytical support.

In 2016 and 2017, the organised criminal group (OCG) stole goods from at least nine driving trucks, with one failed attempt. The OCG moved in several vehicles and had one car driving in front of the targeted truck, keeping it at regular speed on a calm part of a motorway. Two cars drove next to the target, to prevent any other car from passing. Members of the criminal group from a fourth vehicle or van behind the truck jumped from the driving car onto the targeted lorry, using ropes or straps. They then opened the tarpaulin of the truck and loaded stolen goods into their own driving vehicle.

The drivers from the targeted trucks were not aware of the theft going on. The criminal network ensured no other persons could see the thefts, which took place in Romania, Spain and The Netherlands. In one case electronic equipment and state-of-the-art mobile phones were heisted from a truck during a ferry journey between Sweden and Finland, with the driver not on board of his cabin. In most cases the acquired goods were sold in Romania, although part of the equipment has been recovered.

Eurojust provided support to the setting up and functioning of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT), in which Romania, France, Finland, Sweden and The Netherlands participated and awarded financial funds. The Agency held two coordination meetings to prepare for the action, which has led to the arrests and searches.

In Romania, the action was conducted under the direction of the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism – Central Structure, with the support of the Romanian Police Service for Criminal Investigations (DGPMB). Further support was provided by the Central Unit of the Dutch National Police and other national authorities involved.

[Report on a survey on the socio-economic transformation of Europe's coal regions](#)



Brexit content disclaimer

The European Committee of the Regions is in the process of updating some of the content on this website in the light of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. If the site contains content that does not yet reflect the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, it is unintentional and will be addressed.

[Conclusions by the President of the European Council following the video conference on COVID-19](#)

Heads of State and Government welcomed the initiative to hold this video conference on COVID-19.

Member states expressed sympathy with Italy and other member states that are severely hit.

During the video conference on 10 March 2020 we emphasised the need to work together and to do everything necessary and to act swiftly. We stressed the need for a joint European approach and a close coordination with the European Commission. Health ministers and Interior ministers should consult daily to ensure proper coordination and aim for common European guidance.

During the meeting, information and practices were exchanged and 4 priorities identified.

1) **Limiting the spread of the virus.** Member states agreed that our citizens' health is the first priority, and that measures should be based on science

and medical advice. Measures need to be proportional so that they do not have excessive consequences for our societies as a whole. The leaders further agreed that on this point they will share all relevant information through existing coordination mechanisms.^[1]

2) **Provision of medical equipment.** Agreement to task the Commission with analysing the needs and to come up with initiatives to prevent shortages. The Commission informed that it will continue its engagement with the industry and pursue joint public procurements. Moreover, the Commission intends to purchase personal protective equipment through the Civil Protection Framework – RescEU. It must be ensured that the Internal market functions properly and any unjustified obstacles are avoided. Particular attention must be given to masks and respirators.

3) **Promotion research,** including for a vaccine. The Member states stressed the importance of reinforcing efforts on research. The Commission has already mobilised EUR 140 million of funds and selected 17 projects to do this.

4) **Tackling socio-economic consequences.** The Union and its member states, we stand ready to make use of all instruments that are necessary. In particular we will address any impact on liquidity, on support for SME's and specific affected sectors, and their employees. Flexible application of EU rules in particular as regard State aid and Stability and Growth Pact will be needed.

The Commission will closely monitor economic developments in the Union and take all necessary initiatives. Members states and institutions will follow up closely and immediately.

Member states and institutions will follow-up at all levels immediately. The European Council will come back to the matter during **the 26-27 March** summit to take any further decisions needed.

^[1] IPCR (Integrated Political Crisis Response) launched by the Croatian Presidency. The ECDC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) will support MS and provide guidelines.

[Visit the meeting page](#)