In the pursuit of his expansionist policy to recreate the Ottoman Empire, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has already tried to ally with European nations on numerous occasions before. To achieve this goal, he has used various rationales ranging from the fact that Turkey, within the EU alliance, could act as a barrier to prevent the entry of extremist militants from the Middle East into Europe to Ankara’s ability to effectively stem the flow of illegal migrants in the future.

Due to Turkey’s obvious failures on the Syrian front, where Ankara began a military intervention on foreign soil without prior agreement with Damascus, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in an effort to save his image and neo-Ottoman agenda, decided to play one of his trump cards and opened up the route to the North for illegal migrants. As The Guardian openly reported, the move appeared to be “designed to put pressure on Europe to support Turkey’s Idlib operation”.

According to data provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), after Ankara chose not to stem the flow of migrants, there were more than 13,000 people hoping to enter the EU territory on Turkey’s side of its 212-km border with Greece on the evening of 29 February. Euronews provided more specific details about the situation.

As tensions rose in Idlib, the Turkish government made a decision to open, within 72 hours, its borders with Europe and not to halt the flow of illegal immigrants and refugees wishing to enter the EU by land or by sea. Turkey’s police force, and its coast guard and border patrol units were ordered not to intervene. Turkish media outlets have reported that groups of people have gathered on the coast of Çanakkale Province with the aim of reaching the Greek
island of Lesbos by sea. Near Dikili, a town in İzmir Province, refugees are trying to gather enough money to buy inflatable dinghies that they can then use to reach other islands in the Aegean Sea. In Edirne Province, migrants are travelling by bus and on foot towards Turkey’s border with Greece and Bulgaria.

Turkey’s Minister of the Interior Süleyman Soylu wrote in his Twitter feed that by morning on 1 March Turkish border patrol guards had allowed more than 76,000 migrants to enter the EU via Turkey’s borders with Greece and Bulgaria.

In response to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s decision, the governments of Greece and Bulgaria have enhanced their border security. Athens reported that migrants who had attempted to cross the border from Turkey en masse were halted owing to heightened presence of border patrol and coast guard units along the border and in waterways connecting Greek islands to the Aegean coast of Turkey. Greek government spokesman Stelios Petsas stated that Greece was intent on preventing migrants from entering Europe. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen promised to provide support to Bulgaria and Greece in their efforts to protect their borders.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been active in his attempts to justify the decision to open the migrant floodgates by saying that Turkey was “overcrowded with Syrian refugees”, whose numbers supposedly increased on account of the operation to free Idlib from terrorists by the Syrian Army. However, according to the TV channel France 24, there are far more Afghans and North Africans among the migrants than Syrians.

Hence, Europeans have become increasingly concerned about the possibility that a substantial number of terrorists from various groups, including pro-Turkey militants fighting in Syria and Libya, will be able to enter the EU together with migrants and refugees seeking asylum and a better life via the floodgates opened by Ankara. Certain European media outlets point out that Erdogan has earlier issued a warning that "400,000 refugees displaced as a result of the fight for Idlib" were heading towards the Turkish border, and it was estimated that there could be approximately 20,000 Al-Qaida-related (a terrorist organization banned in the Russia Federation) fighters among them. The President of Turkey does not need problems of such nature, which is why Ankara opened up its borders with Europe.

Aside from the presence of terrorists among refugees, a flow of illegal migrants poses another threat – the spread of the Coronavirus. At present, there are approximately 4 million immigrants in Turkey, who are now free to travel to the EU. And obviously, no one is going to check their temperature before they leave Turkey. According to Bulgarian officials, the possibility of a new refugee crisis is a huge threat considering the fact that Europe is attempting to get the Coronavirus outbreak under control.

Unfortunately, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s decision to open the migrant floodgates, his recent policy towards Syria and the state of Ankara’s relations with the EU and NATO have not helped him garner outside support. Moreover, there is increased exasperation with his actions in many nations. The U.S. international news agency Bloomberg published their own assessment of Ankara’s overall foreign policy course, and of the way the situation was developing with regards to Turkey’s position on Idlib, Syria. Bloomberg points out that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s bargaining technique entails aiming one pistol at the West and pressing another to Ankara’s own temple.

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