Will Europe manage to pay Erdogan off?

A threat of a new influx of illegal migrants to the European Union compels the EU leaders to make concessions to Ankara’s clearly inflated demands. This is an acute matter since among migrants there might be the so-called “jihadists,” capable of carrying out large acts of terrorism in Europe.

Just recently, a summit of leaders of the EU and Turkey held in Brussels came to a close, but the final resolution on migrants will be adopted only on March 17-18. Turkey expressed willingness to admit any illegal migrants arriving in Greek islands from the Middle East regardless of their citizenship as well as to accept the migrants who have come to Europe from the Turkish territory, but have not settled there. The EU, in its turn, is supposed to accept one Syrian refugee from the refugee camps established in Turkey for each Syrian refugee that returned to Turkey. It is expected that this system will discourage refugees, including from Syria, from trying to infiltrate Europe illegally. In exchange, Ankara demanded a twofold increase of the amount allocated from the EU’s budget for these purposes (from 3 to 6 billion euros). But Erdogan’s appetite for financial aid goes beyond the stated amount. Ankara talks about amounts between 9 and 20 billion euros. A number of EU countries, Italy in particular, refused to authorize the “payment of tribute” to the Turkish leadership. Other countries are still deliberating the amount, term and other conditions of financial aid to Ankara. As a compensation for its favors to Brussels, Turkey requested a visa-free regime for Turkish citizens entering the countries of EU and proposed to accelerate the accession of Turkey to the European Union.

It looks like Erdogan’s political blackmailing of the EU is bringing its fruit. European leaders show tendency toward cooperation with Turkey on its conditions, though with some reservations. As German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated, “Europe is willing to accept Turkey’s request to simplify visa regime. If the Turkey-proposed plan is adopted and implemented, visa-free regime for the citizens of Turkey entering the EU may be introduced as early as in June.” President of the European Council Donald Tusk has also confirmed a successful “harmonization of principles” outlined in the plan worked out by Turkish PM Ahmet Davutoglu. What is behind the EU leaders’ flexibility?

Uncontrolled migration to the EU famously turned out to be one of the most serious threats faced by the European Union at the moment. According to Eurostat, 1.25 million foreigners petitioned for asylum in 2015. It is expected that in 2016 there will be another noticeable increase in the number of arriving refugees. Some member states of the Schengen Area express concern over such prospects. They demand to restore order in the Schengen Area and threaten to take control over the situation within their boundaries on their own. If that happens, the principle of free movement within the Area—one of the fundamental principles of Eurointegration—might be endangered. A significant number of refugees arrive in the EU through the “Balkan corridor.” They move through Turkey to Greece and then through the Eastern Europe to Germany and to other West European countries, which have more than once asked Ankara to close its borders for refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees assesses current commitments demonstrated by the countries of the EU as “not sufficient for the demand”: only 20 thousand refugees will be accepted on voluntary basis within two years. Representatives of UN point out that the principle of family reunification must be observed when a decision on the refugee relocation is taken.

It is unlikely that the agreement that the EU is planning to sign with Erdogan in March 2016 will resolve the problem...
of illegal migration to Europe. The truth is that the funds the EU disburses to Turkey, even if they are spent on the needs of refugees, whose number is estimated at about 3 million, cannot eradicate the root cause for which refugees flee to Turkey. Ankara has been actively participating in armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq for several years now, and is not going to cease its provocative and subversive activities in these regions. Erdogan’s ultimate goals in Syria include overthrowing the regime of Bashar al-Assad, granting military and other assistance to armed opposition, gangs of Turkmens and other Islamist groups. Turkish authorities continue their cooperation with radical Islamists (ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra), though not very explicitly. There is plenty of evidence, confirmed by Turkish military and mass media, that Turkey continues to supply jihadists with weapons and ammunition, turns a blind eye to the transit of thousands of new mercenaries and volunteers to Syria and Iraq through its territory and winks at the procurement of oil and museum artifacts by Turkish mediators from ISIS militants. Despite the truce declared by Damascus and its opposition, Turkish troops continue the shelling of Kurdish enclaves in the Syrian territory. And, in doing so, Ankara undermines the forces of Kurdish militiamen fighting against ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. One more thing should be mentioned here. Thousands of Turkish businessmen and functionaries are cashing in on the human smuggling. Border patrol and customs services are also involved in this shady business.

To achieve a minimization of the flow of migrants from the Middle East to Europe, a comprehensive program should be implemented. The peace process initiated between Damascus and Syrian opposition should be intensified. Any support to radical Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq should be completely cut off. Militants must be blocked. A decisive military defeat on militants of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra should be inflicted. The territories (the cities of Raqqa and Mosul) once occupied by radical militants should be cleaned up. Only satisfaction of these prerequisites can guarantee the creation of the right conditions required to put an end to the civil war in Syria and Iraq, to restore the devastated infrastructure, living quarters and life support systems of the region and to begin a gradual relocation of refugees back to their homeland. Today Turkey and its regional partners (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan) visibly impede the restoration of peace and order in the region. Their actions provoke a new exodus of native population from the countries of the Middle East to Europe. By disbursing money to Erdogan, the EU leadership is only pushing the problem of migrants underground and encourages Ankara to pursue its adventuristic and aggressive regional policy.

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