*IMPACTS OF SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISES ON TURKISH INTERNATONAL MIGRATION POLICY*

by

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Four years ago, when the so-called Arab Spring began, it was discussed whether Turkey would be a part of these events. Today, we see that Turkey is a part of this with more than one million refugees from its neighbor, Syria.

The aim of this presentation is to define the current situation in Turkey in relation with refuges, specifically the Syrians. It is claimed that Turkey is establishing a new refugee regime at domestic level. Latest Syrian refugee crisis, just like 1991 Iraqi refugee crisis, has led major structural, legal and institutional changes in Turkey in relation with the refugee policy.

Actually, this is not the first massive refugee flow from a neighboring country to Turkey. One of the major crisis of forced migration in in post-Cold War period did occur in 1991, consisting of Kurdish people who fled from Iraq. The second and the biggest crises is the result of a civil war in Syria. Turkey received those people with open arms, officially speaking Turkey did follow an “open door” policy.

It is possible to define push and pull factors in case of Syrian refugees in Turkey. There’s no doubt that they were forced to flee from Syria because of civil war. Despite the fact that war is the main push factor for many Syrian refuges there are millions of internally displaced people in Syria who could not leave their countries due to several reasons. Furthermore, it is obvious that economic environment in Syria as well as Iraq is very much deteriorated and may also be considered as a push factor.

Pull factors can be described mainly as geographic location of Turkey which has long land and sea borders both with the EU and refuggee sending Middle Eastern countries; historical ties, religion and kinship. Furthermore Turkey’s expanding economy is a source attraction for many transit migrants. Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, Turkey is estimated to host almost two million Syrians. Turkey has maintained an emergency response of a consistently high standard and declared a temporary protection regime, ensuring non-refoulement and assistance in 22 camps. In 2014, Turkey also witnessed an unprecedented increase in asylum applications from Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians. Deteriorating security in Iraq saw a sudden increase in Iraqi refugees: an estimated 81,000 were in Turkey by September 2014, with numbers expected to grow to 100,000 by year-end. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey in 2015 is expected to rise .

While Turkey still maintains the geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection which came into force in April 2014 provides the legal basis for protection and assistance for asylum-seekers and refugees, regardless of their country of origin.

In accordance with the geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention , Turkey does not accept non-European asylum seekers as refugees. This “geographic limitation” causes conceptual confusion.Turkey defined these asylum-seekers or non-European refugees as “guests” in the early days of this influx. In order to prevent this ambiguity, Turkey amended its legislation on this issue and made a new law and issued a direction.

This refugee influx with a great number of people is leading to a turning point in Turkey’s immigration policy.

Turkey also established Directorate General for Migration Management. But, it is not enough to overcome this problem. Many institutions –Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, Red Crescent, Ministry of Foreign Affairs- are working together.

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Short BIO

Özlem Pehlivan was born in 1984, Canakkale, Turkey. She graduated from Gazi University (in Ankara) with a double major in International Relations and Business Administration. She worked in a private sector as an accountant for four years. She is a graduate student at International Relations department, at Hacettepe University. She studies on Turkey’s international migration policy.