

Position

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The EU-Turkey Deal Is Based on a Fundamental Misunderstanding Implications for Future Cooperation and Ways to Improve Communication

Abstract

The EU-Turkey Deal Is Based on a Fundamental Misunderstanding – Implications for Future Cooperation and Ways to Improve Communication

March 2023 marks seven years since the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. Before, Germany and other EU Member States experienced what had been dubbed the “Syrian refugee crisis”. For many in Europe, the mantra since then has been “Never again 2015”. This reduction of the global Syrian refugee crisis to the events in Europe in 2015 is part of a fundamental misunderstanding between Turkey and the EU that has triggered recurring diplomatic conflict around the statement. This misunderstanding lies in the different meaning the statement had for Turkey and the EU, respectively. For the EU, the statement was about keeping irregular migration at bay, whereas for Turkey, the statement signified a new joint effort to align Turkey more with the EU. A potential update of the statement should therefore ensure agreement not only on the terms but also on the purpose of a Statement 2.0.

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A Fickle Agreement, A Fundamental Misunderstanding

The terrible earthquake in Southeast Turkey and Northern Syria on 6 February 2023 has raised many questions. One of them is the future of EU-Turkey cooperation on irregular migration under the new conditions. So far, this cooperation has for the most part been guided by the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. But as many will recall, after dozens of Turkish soldiers were killed by an airstrike in Northern Syria in February 2020, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that the situation on the other side of the Turkish-Syrian border had worsened to an extent that new refugee flows into Turkey were to be expected and that, in consequence, the EU-Turkey Statement could no longer be upheld. The result was Turkey's unilateral opening of its border with Greece and a diplomatic crisis between Turkey and the EU. This shows how fickle the statement is, especially in response to exogenous shocks.

Given this fickleness, there has been much talk about an update of the statement across think tanks and policymaking:¹ While some adamantly call for an update, others emphasise the need for a funding renewal rather than for a new statement altogether.² Still others oppose the statement in principle on moral grounds.³ To date, most analyses of the statement discuss whether the agreement was ethical or legal,⁴ to what extent its implementation was successful,⁵ and what its impact on general EU-Turkey relations has been.⁶ All these approaches, however, have insufficiently problematised one aspect that is essential to both evaluating the past and planning the future of the statement: Turkey and the EU each agreed to the statement based on fundamentally different understandings of its meaning. This difference in perspective is the underlying breeding ground of recurring diplomatic conflict over the statement. It is also exemplary of a more general "logic of misunderstanding" in EU-Turkey relations.

For the EU, the statement first and foremost is a mutual agreement about managing irregular migration and, in particular, the reception of Syrian refugees. To achieve this, the EU offered various benefits to Turkey relating to progress on topics such as visa liberalisation, customs union modernisation and general accession talks, on top of providing financial support for hosting the refugees. Frustrated with Turkey on various accounts, the EU agreed to a deal that, to their mind, would accept this all-time low in bilateral relations and lay the

- 1 The authors' recommendation for a Statement 2.0 is one of the central findings of the recent study *M. Murat Erdoğan / Nihal Eminoğlu / Laura Batalla Adam / K. Onur Onutulmaz / Friedrich Püttmann, Perceptions of European and Turkish Decision-Makers of the Syrian Crisis*, Berlin: Centre for Applied Turkey Studies, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.cats-network.eu/projects/former-projects/perceptions-of-european-and-turkish-decision-makers-of-the-syrian-crisis
- 2 *Walter Glos / Murat Erdoğan / Friedrich Püttmann, Viel Übereinstimmung, aber (noch) kein Überkommen – Schlussfolgerungen des digitalen Migrationsgipfels 2020 der KAS Türkei*, Ankara: Konrad Adenauer Foundation 2020, Turkey Office.
- 3 See footnote (fn) 1.
- 4 *Refugees International, EU-Turkey Statement: Six Years of Undermining Refugee Protection*, Refugee International, 17 March 2022, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2022/3/16/eu-turkey-statement-six-years-of-undermining-refugee-protection
- 5 *European Commission, EU-Turkey Statement: Four Years On*, 2022, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-03/20200318_managing-migration-eu-turkey-statement-4-years-on_en.pdf
- 6 *Migration Policy Institute, The EU-Turkey Deal, Five Years On: A Frayed and Controversial but Enduring Blueprint*, Washington DC: MPI 2021, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.migrationpolicy.org/article/eu-turkey-deal-five-years-on

ground for a political transaction that would be in the interest of both sides with joint migration management as the last productive policy field in common.⁷

For Turkey, in contrast, the statement was an opportunity to realise the long-awaited prospect of visa liberalisation, move ahead with the modernisation of the customs union, and blow new wind into the stalled accession talks.⁸ To achieve this, Turkey would take on the burden of hosting the highest number of refugees in the world with the financial help of the EU and cooperate on stopping further irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. Feeling neglected by the EU, if not deliberately kept at a distance, Turkey agreed to a deal that, in their mind, would revitalise bilateral relations and bring Turkey and the EU closer together again with joint migration management as the steppingstone for this. In this context, then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's personal ambitions to score a political success⁹ – which sometimes even went unnoticed by President Erdoğan or against his own agenda – played an important role in Turkey's efforts at settling the agreement with the EU.

For the EU, the outcome was a statement on managing migration with a subsection on revitalising Turkey's EU accession talks. For Turkey, the outcome was a statement on revitalising Turkey's EU accession talks with a subsection on managing migration. In this sense, the EU regarded its central elements to be Turkey hosting the Syrian refugees in exchange for the EU's financial support. Accession talks were considered an additional incentive and tied to pre-existing conditions. Turkey, in contrast, regarded the central element of the agreement to be its rapprochement with the EU, which would benefit both sides in their view. Managing migration was considered the occasion, not the cause.

The fact that each party has approached the statement with a different perspective has caused a fundamental misunderstanding on the question of what the statement essentially is about and why it exists. And it has resulted in drastically different perceptions of the costs and benefits for the different parties,¹⁰ as seen in recurring later eruptions of diplomatic conflict until today, most notably the Greek-Turkish border crisis of 28 February 2020.¹¹ As Alice Taylor and Tuvan Gumrukcu wrote about Turkey's view on the issue in January 2022:

"Speaking to ambassadors from EU countries at a meeting in Ankara, Erdogan said Turkey wanted to *set ties with the bloc on a 'more solid foundation'* but had been subjected to 'stalling tactics'. 'I want to state with sadness that we did not receive the response we wanted from the EU side to these steps,' he said. [...] 'Turkey has not received meaningful support from the EU in its battle with migration,' Erdogan said, adding it *would not be possible to have 'deepened cooperation' on the issue as long as the terms of the 2016 agreement were not updated.*"¹² [authors' emphases]

The fact that this underlying misunderstanding between Turkey and the EU regarding the primary purpose of the joint Statement has not been properly addressed until today has

7 See fn 1.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 David M. Herszenhorn / Jacopo Barigazzi (2020), EU Leaders Meet Erdoğan to Resolve Fight over Refugees, Politico, 9 March 2020, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.politico.eu/article/erdogan-meeting-brussels-eu-leaders-refugees-fight/

12 Alice Taylor / Tuvan Gumrukcu, Erdogan Tells EU Envoys Bloc Ignored Turkey's Efforts to Improve ties, in: Euractiv, 13 January 2022, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/erdogan-tells-eu-envoys-bloc-ignored-turkeys-efforts-to-improve-ties/

fuelled disappointment and mistrust on each side. Attaining a more sustainable joint migration management and a more productive EU-Turkey relationship overall – possibly by means of an EU-Turkey Statement 2.0 – therefore requires resolving this misunderstanding before all else.¹³

How Did We Get There?

In the EU, September 2015 is generally remembered as the peak of the “Syrian refugee crisis”. It is associated with massive flows of irregular migration across the Aegean from Turkey into Greece, with a high number of irregular migrants dying at sea, and with a loss of control over the situation in terms of adequate first reception, the processing of asylum claims, and European border security. For many, the events also signify the collapse of the EU asylum system,¹⁴ tensions between EU Member States over the distribution of the asylum seekers,¹⁵ and the rapid rise of the European far-right on the political horizon.¹⁶ Various EU members other than Germany and Sweden were reluctant to accept large numbers of Syrian refugees. Therefore, in German politics today, a typical slogan heard is: “Never again 2015”. While many Germans and Syrian refugees reminisce about Chancellor Merkel’s policy as a great humanitarian act and sign of Germany’s alleged new *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcome),¹⁷ others have criticised that Merkel’s allegedly *laissez-faire* attitude towards border security was what essentially enabled the *Alternative für Deutschland* party to fully establish itself in German politics and dramatically increase its influence.¹⁸

In Turkey, in contrast, the beginning of the “Syrian refugee crisis” is remembered as concomitant with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the arrival of the first Syrian refugees in Turkey in 2011 – although its perception as a “crisis” may be attributed to a later point in time since the general understanding in Turkey during the initial years was that only a small number of Syrians would flee to Turkey and that they would return again shortly after. As a result, President Erdoğan is likewise famously remembered by many Syrian refugees for his strongly humanitarian approach to the issue in the shape of Turkey’s “open-door policy” towards displaced Syrians.¹⁹ However, as the war dragged on and the Syrians’ stay in Turkey protracted, it became clear that Turkey, like Lebanon and Jordan, had become

13 See fn 1.

14 *Human Rights Watch*, EU Policies Put Refugees at Risk – An Agenda to Restore Protection, New York: HRW 2016, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/23/eu-policies-put-refugees-risk

15 *Ian Traynor*, Germany Presses for Quota System for EU Migrant Distribution, in: *The Guardian*, 29 April 2015, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/germany-quota-system-eu-migrant-distribution

16 *Nazmus Sakib / Syed Muhammad Ishraque Osman*, Syrian Refugee Influx and the Rise of Far-right Rhetoric: A Quasi-experimental Investigation, in: *European Politics and Society*, 21 (4) 2019, pp. 371–383.

17 *Doris Akrap*, Germany’s Response to the Refugee Crisis is Admirable. But I Fear It Cannot Last, in: *The Guardian*, 6 September 2015, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2015/sep/06/germany-refugee-crisis-syrian

18 *Dietmar Neuerer*, Wie Angela Merkel die AfD vor dem Untergang bewahrte, in: *Handelsblatt*, 31 August 2020, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/interview-wie-angela-merkel-die-afd-vor-dem-untergang-bewahrte/26143854.html

19 *Kemal Kirişci*, Syrian Refugees in Turkey – The Limits of an Open Door Policy, Washington DC: Brookings Institution 2013, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2013/06/27/syrian-refugees-in-turkey-the-limits-of-an-open-door-policy/



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addresses the 77th UN General Assembly in New York on 20 September 2022, showing a picture of a refugee camp run by the Red Crescent. Photo: shutterstock / Lev Radin

a victim of its own humanitarianism. In reaction, Turkey appealed to global solidarity and burden sharing with regard to distributing the refugees but to little avail.²⁰

As a result, today, Turkey hosts the highest number of refugees in the world, with 3.6 million of them being registered Syrians alone and many more unregistered Syrians as well as at least 400,000 irregular migrants from other countries (especially Afghanistan) in addition.²¹ To put this into perspective, in 2010, the number of registered asylum-seekers in Turkey was 10,000.²² Meanwhile, the number of registered refugees in Germany, which has almost the same overall population as Turkey, stood at 2.2 million in 2023 – the third-highest worldwide.²³ Many Turks, today, resent the Syrians' long-term stay and criticise President Erdoğan for losing control over the situation. Moreover, many feel alienated and provoked by the Islamic discourse that the President later began using to generate public support for the reception of the refugees.²⁴ They accuse him of keeping the Syrian refugees in Turkey to further his own political interests, such as nationalising them to create new loyal voters for his conservative Islamic party and providing cheap labour to his peers in big

20 UNHCR, Statement made by the President of the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, at the Opening Session of the Global Refugee Forum, 17 December 2019, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.unhcr.org/5dfce7bc4.pdf

21 Same, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Turkey, 2023, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-turkey

22 World Bank, Refugee Population by Country or Territory of Asylum – Türkiye, 2023, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?locations=TR>

23 UNHCR, Refugee Data Finder, 2023, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/

24 Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Trabzon toplu acilis toreninde yaptiklari konuşma (Speech at the Trabzon mass inauguration), 10 October 2014, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/2945/trabzon-toplu-acilis-torende-yaptiklari-konusma

business.²⁵ Still, many Turks have long taken pride in the great hospitality they showed towards the Syrians while regarding 2015 as a complete moral failure on the side of the EU. According to the latest *Syrians Barometer* (2020), however, this pride has vanished; instead, even of President Erdoğan's electorate, only 27 percent find his refugee policy "correct", whereas 46 percent find it "wrong".²⁶

Both the EU and Turkey had to come to terms with their proclaimed humanitarian commitments on the one hand and their ostensible loss of control on the other. This particularly applied to two individuals: German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Chancellor Merkel had to prove that her "friendly face towards those in need", as she once called it,²⁷ did not end in an unmanageable situation and that her slogan *Wir schaffen das* (We can do it) would actualise itself. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Davutoğlu was on the lookout for an opportunity to consolidate his position in Turkish politics by achieving something the Turkish public was intensely longing for: EU visa liberalisation. Merkel needed to send out the message "This crisis will be over soon", whereas Davutoğlu hoped to communicate to the Turks "This crisis will have benefits for us."²⁸ Being portrayed as responsible for the refugee crisis in their respective societies and heavily criticised for it by some, they both were pressed to get the situation under control. These were the perspectives with which the Statement of 18 March 2016 was made.

While the statement represents an agreement between both sides, accommodating their respective "wish lists", it is the remaining difference in perception of its nature that would later drive the conflict over its implementation. For the EU, Turkey proved unreliable in February 2020 in keeping the migration flows under control, which for the EU was the whole point of the statement. For Turkey, in contrast, the EU has proven unreliable because it did not recognise that the revived rapprochement constituted the statement's actual purpose for Turkey and that stopping the irregular migration flows was considered to be merely the first step towards a newly intensified cooperation between the two sides.

Much debate about the statement has focused on whether it represents an instance of "transactionalism", that is, political horse-trade, undermining the general trust and solidarity between the two sides.²⁹ This debate leads to the related but, in our view, even more central question of whether the statement and its new type of cooperation on migration management have further *distanced* Turkey and the EU from each other or brought them *closer* again. From the vantage point of many European policymakers, managing migration is the last policy field in which fruitful cooperation between Turkey and the EU is taking place and, thus, if it were not for the statement, Turkey and the EU might be even more distanced from each other. In the view of many Turkish policymakers, in contrast, the hope of coming closer to the EU again by means of the statement clearly has not been fulfilled. Rather, the statement seems to have made the alternative to full EU membership for Turkey

25 *CHP Haber*, CHP Genel Başkan Yardımcısı'ndan, Erdoğan'ın Suriyelilere vatandaşlık verileceği açıklamasına (Statement by CHP Deputy Chairperson on Erdoğan's declaration to give Syrians Turkish citizenship), 2016, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.facebook.com/chphaber/photos/a.369781219841960/638039786349434/?type=3&comment_%20id=638063939680352&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D

26 M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2020*, Ankara: UNHCR 2021, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2022/03/SB-2020-Ingilizce-son.pdf

27 *Universität Bern*, Besuch der Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel an der Universität Bern, 10 September 2015, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7Y-3VOMKQs

28 See fn 1.

29 Luigi Scazzieri, Turkey and the EU: Preserving Transactional Co-Operation, London: Centre for European Reform 2020, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: www.cer.eu/publications/archive/bulletin-article/2020/turkey-and-eu-preserving-transactional-co-operation

– the model of a privileged partnership – finally a practical reality, turning Turkey from a potential member of the EU into a neighbour or, more precisely, a “border state” forever. It is this perception and disappointment on the Turkish side that until today has insufficiently been understood in Berlin, Brussels, and beyond.

It is also this fundamental difference in perception that has caused both sides to essentially talk past each other in their previous diplomatic conflicts over the statement in recent years. Let us illustrate this misunderstanding in the shape of a fictional dialogue:

Both: *We have a deal – you have stick to it.*

EU: *We are, but you are threatening us with opening the border for irregular migrants.*

Turkey: *No, we are the ones who are sticking to it, but you are not delivering the political concessions you promised.*

EU: *Those are tied to clear conditions that you just haven't met yet.*

Turkey: *That may be true, but without these benefits, the statement makes no sense for us.*

EU: *We had a deal!*

Turkey: *We thought you wanted to become friends again and not just make deals!*

EU: *But we really appreciate your efforts! Besides, you've gotten so much money from us! How about we send some more?*

Turkey: *That's not the point!*

What we try to show here – in a playful manner – is that while the EU focuses on the terms of the statement and becomes upset about Turkey's diversion from it, it is this perceived 'hyperfixation' on the statement itself that upsets Turkey, which for its own part feels that a general deepening of the partnership is no longer relevant to the EU at all. This is the crux of the fundamental misunderstanding.

Two factors additionally impeded the potential success of the agreement: First, on 22 May 2016, two months after the statement was made, then-Turkish Prime Minister Davutoğlu was dismissed from office by President Erdoğan, possibly due to Davutoğlu's new fame.³⁰ Second, on 15 July 2016, four months after the statement was made, Turkey experienced a dramatic coup attempt. With the dismissal of Prime Minister Davutoğlu, Turkey's main political driving force behind the statement had disappeared from the diplomatic stage. And with Turkey's domestic policies following the coup attempt, EU-Turkey relations entered a new phase of crises on the topics of democracy and the rule of law. So, where to from here?

Can a New Statement Solve this Problem?

In the debate surrounding a potential EU-Turkey Statement 2.0, various voices in policy-making have advised Turkey and the EU to refrain from including any political concessions outside the immediate field of migration management in a new version of the statement. Instead, the two parties should exclusively focus on migration. This, they argue, would make implementing the updated statement a lot more likely and avoid disappointment on both sides.

As has become clear above, however, this advice overlooks that these political concessions were the very motivation for Turkey to agree to the statement in the first place. Meanwhile,

30 Constanze Letsch, Turkish PM Davutoğlu Resigns as President Erdoğan Tightens Grip, in: The Guardian, 5 May 2016, last accessed 18 February at: www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/05/ahmet-davutoglu-future-turkish-prime-minister-balance

Turkish public attitudes have drastically turned against Syrian refugees, and for many Turkish citizens, the cost of hosting them is not only economic but also political and cultural. As a result, the topic has become a defining element of the fast-nearing national elections. The political opposition has made it a central promise of their electoral campaign to initiate the return of most Syrian refugees to Syria by seeking dialogue with Syria's dictator Bashar al-Assad. In response to this political challenge and the unignorable anti-refugee resentment in Turkish society, also President Erdoğan has changed course on the refugee issue, likewise promising their return by striking a new deal with Assad and building brick houses for them in the Turkish-controlled areas of Northern Syria. Today, his only marker of distinction on this issue is his slogan of a "voluntary, safe and dignified return" (gönüllü, güvenli ve onurlu geri dönüş) for the Syrian refugees – practically speaking, his policy goals are the same.³¹

This situation makes convincing Turkey of continuing to host the Syrian refugees – instead of sending them back to Syria – a lot more difficult. For most Syrian refugees, though, staying in Turkey is their preferred option as Syria continues to be unsafe for them under Assad and provides them with virtually no prospects to build a new life. As new public opinion surveys indicate, more than half of the Syrian refugees in Turkey want to move on to Europe again – be that legally or illegally. In the 2019 edition of the "Syrians Barometer", supported by UNHCR, only 10.5 percent of interviewed Syrian refugees affirmed the question "If Turkey opens the border to Greece again, would you go to the border and try to cross it?".³² In the 2020 edition, meanwhile, this rate jumped to 35.9 percent. More generally, the "Syrians Barometer" series also shows that the desire of Syrian refugees to move to countries other than Turkey or Syria has steadily increased over time, reaching 55 percent in 2020. For the EU, this creates a dilemma. On the one hand, it has externalised a big share of the Syrian refugee reception to Turkey and alienated its government and people in doing so. On the other hand, it needs a prosperous and cooperative Turkey more than ever so that the Syrian refugees neither cross the Aegean towards the EU nor are sent into danger in Syria.

The solution to this problem therefore can only be to identify a political benefit that the EU is still willing to give Turkey that does not require the fulfilment of other pre-existing conditions, besides Turkey managing migration in cooperation with the EU. The fact that, in the current statement, concessions such as visa liberalisation were tied both to the implementation of the statement and to previous conditions set out by the EU enlargement process effectively created a public communications disaster in Turkey. In the eyes of many Turkish citizens, Turkey had done its share, and the EU was withholding the reward behind excuses. To prevent this and to make EU-Turkey cooperation on migration more sustainable in terms of public support, this new political benefit should be independent of Turkey's EU accession process and still convey the feeling that Turkey and the EU are moving closer together again. One obvious candidate for this political concession is the modernisation of the Customs Union, but there may be other suitable options, too.

For many Turks, the most desired way of reapproaching the EU is the liberalisation of visas. In fact, it matters for them almost as much as EU membership itself. Against this background,

31 *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, Temel Stratejimiz: Gönüllü, Güvenli ve Onurlu Geri Dönüş (Our Core Strategy: Voluntary, Safe and Dignified Returns) 2014, last accessed 18 February at: www.icisleri.gov.tr/temel-stratejimiz-gonullu-guvenli-ve-onurlu-geri-donus

32 *M. Murat Erdoğan*, *Syrians Barometer 2019*, Ankara: UNHCR 2020, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/syrians-barometer-2019-framework-achieving-social-cohesion-syrians-turkey-july-2020>

a large portion of Turkish society feels punished for the tense relations between the EU and Turkey's President Erdoğan. Their hope is a new government that quickly fulfils the outstanding six criteria set by the EU. These are (1) Implementing the National Strategy and Action Plan on the Fight against Corruption, (2) Concluding and implementing an Operational Cooperation Agreement with EUROPOL, (3) Revising the legal framework regarding terrorism and organised crime in line with the ECHR and ECtHR, (4) Providing effective judicial cooperation in criminal matters to all EU Members States, (5) Adopting and implementing legislation on the protection of personal data in line with EU standards, and (6) Implementing the EU-Turkey readmission agreement in all its provisions.³³

Implementing visa liberalisation for Turks in the near future would therefore be an effective way to restrengthen the social ties and people-to-people contact between the societies of Turkey and the EU. Meanwhile, the Turkish government should be aware of the EU's rules, reaffirm its commitment to liberal democracy and the rule of law, and not turn refugees into tools or weapons. On the other hand, the EU should develop a new framework for its relations with Turkey to realise its strategic interest and European values. The issue of the Syrian refugees that gave rise to the Statement of 18 March 2016 is still very much alive and increasingly causing social and political tensions inside Turkey. Therefore, the EU cannot suppress it through a simple policy of externalisation in the shape of financial support to Turkey in exchange for hosting the refugees. Moreover, the EU should also decide what kind of Turkey policy it will pursue after a possible change of government that may occur following the next national elections in Turkey.³⁴ Those will likely require a new EU policy on Turkey more generally. The issue of the refugees requires long-term cooperation. If Turkey withdraws from Syria, a joint EU-Turkey management of the border region will be needed this time as well as a common Syria and possibly even Iran policy. Striving for these goals does not seem sustainable in the medium and long term through transactional policies only. All these aspects should be considered when discussing the details of a Statement 2.0.

Even more essentially, though, an update of the EU-Turkey Statement should be used to overcome the misunderstandings of the past. Written agreements have the inherent beauty that they make the terms of a deal clear and transparent. However, that alone does not suffice to make their implementation clear and transparent, too. What is more, every statement may carry a different meaning for different people. These differences in interpretation of the agreement are prime reasons for conflict over it. To make a Statement 2.0 more successful and less prone to diplomatic conflict than the current one, it is therefore fundamental to not only agree on the text but also on the meaning of the text and the expectations with which it is written and signed. For many Turks, the EU-Turkey Statement on migration has driven Turkey and the EU even further apart, counter to their hopes and expectations. An update of the statement would be a chance to rectify this disappointment as this process would engage the two sides once more in trying to understand each other's perspective fully. No matter the written result, it is this process of mutual understanding that is now urgently needed.

This is all the more true after the terrible recent earthquake of 6 February 2023. Nobody can predict what this will mean for the topic of migration and the Syrian refugees. Will there be

33 See: *European Stability Initiative*, Visa Roadmap Scorecard – Turkey, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: <https://esiweb.org/visa-roadmap-scorecard-turkey>

34 *Bianet*, Two Polls Show Turkey's Main Opposition Party Surpasses Erdogan's AKP, 5 July 2022, last accessed 18 February 2023 at: <https://m.bianet.org/english/politics/264179-two-polls-show-turkey-s-main-opposition-party-surpasses-erdogan-s-akp>

new refugee flows from Syria towards Turkey? And if so, would Turkey admit them? Will the Turkish citizens' anger at the Syrian refugees' presence in Turkey heat up even more under the new conditions? Or will the shared experience of the traumatic natural disaster incite a new spirit of solidarity between them? The only thing that seems certain at the time of writing is that all those who lost their homes as a result of the earthquakes will look for new ones – and in the case of the Syrian refugees, they might as well try to do so by irregularly crossing into the EU, given the rising anti-refugee sentiment in Turkish society already before the earthquake. To prevent this, the EU will now especially need to make new and increased efforts at facilitating the peaceful settlement of the Syrian refugees in Turkey. However, without the agreement of the Turkish host society, this equals “mission impossible”. This underlines the importance of our argument – now more than ever.