

## 1. MIGRATION AND GEOPOLITICS

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# Migration and geopolitics

COMMENTARY | BY THANOS DOKOS\*

The significant increase in the arrival of refugees and migrants recorded on Greece's Aegean islands over the past few weeks is cause for concern as it indicates that Turkey is seeking to exploit the issue in order to remind the European Union of Ankara's critical role in containing inflows. It is also a way for it to put pressure on Greece. Naturally, Turkey is making sure that the numbers do not become so excessive as to cross certain red lines.

This is not the only reason for the spike in arrivals, as Turkey also has a domestic interest in reducing the number of Syrian refugees it is hosting, either by returning them to "safe" zones in Syria or by pushing them toward us.

Furthermore, the clashes at Idlib in northwestern Syria are contributing to the rise in the number of refugees leaving the country, while there is also concern about Islamic extremists trying to pass as refugees in order to escape. For this to be stopped, information and security services on all sides that may be affected need to actively work together.

Last but not least, it should be noted that there has also been a change in the composition of the new arrivals, with a marked increase in the ratio of economic and, gradually, of environmental migrants, a trend that is expected to continue in the future.

As far as Greece's management of the fresh crisis is concerned, its only choice right now is to better control its sea border, with as much support as possible from Europe in the Aegean and on the Evros land border, together with the acceleration of asylum procedures, the deportation of those who have been denied protection, and the utilization of existing resources – all areas where the previous government's efforts proved inadequate. The transfer of migrants and refugees from island camps to facilities on the mainland also needs to continue. Of course the only real way the issue can be addressed is at the European level, where, however, there are significant disagreements concerning how the burden should be shared within the European Union. A greater effort from Athens to communicate with Turkey on the bilateral level – however difficult this may appear right now – would also be useful.

In the long term, the priority should be on preventing the violent radicalization of refugees and migrants in Greece by ensuring their smooth assimilation into society, and, on this front, education is the most valuable tool.

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NIKOS ARVANITIDIS/ANA-MPA

Dozens of refugees and migrants wait to board buses at the port of Thessaloniki in northern Greece last week after being transferred from the cramped Moria camp on the eastern Aegean island of Lesbos.