

## Dr Triantafyllos Karatrantos

Research Fellow, European Security and Asymmetric threats, ELIAMEP

# Global challenges, malicious activity, and EU inertia fuel migrant flows

Interview to Vassilis Kopsachilis

**GR Diplomatic Review:** The so-called Arab Spring produced a new reality for Turkey. More than 4 million immigrants from Iraq and Syria came into Turkey, and since then Ankara claims that these immigrants are a potential destabilizing factor towards the country's resources and social equilibrium. Are these Turkish claims unfounded?

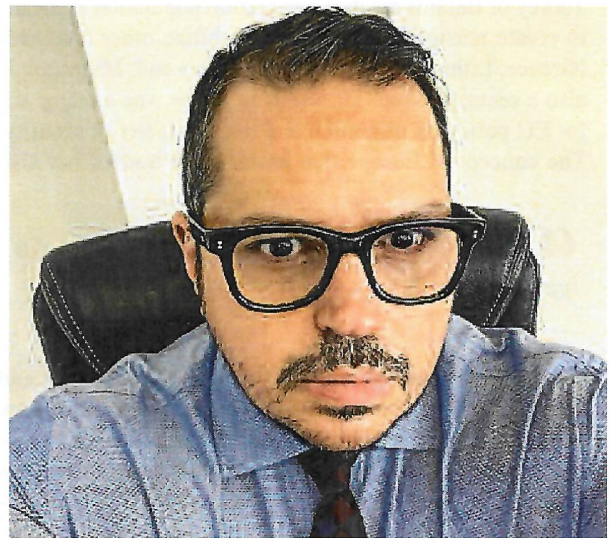
**Triantafyllos Karatrantos:** Is not only the Arab Spring, but also numerous events and mainly conflicts and wars in the MENA region that creates a new reality with forced migration. For example the war in Syria and the refugee population leaving the country is the catalyst which leads to the major refugee/ migration crisis that EU faced in 2015- 2016. Furthermore, we need to highlight that Turkey is not acting as a typical front- line state receiving big migration flows (i.e. like Greece and Italy), but in some cases (i.e. Syria and Libya),

“ *There is no legal bidding mechanism, only the prerequisites for EU funding* ”

it's policy and involvement creates destabilization, and especially in the case of Syria Erdogan's policy and plans leads to more than 2.000.000 Syrian refugees in Turkey. To this end, Turkey is handling an important number of asylum seekers. If we also take into consideration the difficult economic situation in the country, we can understand why migration is an important problem for Erdogan's administration and many Turkish people are against the reception of so many immigrants.

**GR DR:** From 2015 onwards, Turkey openly uses immigration as a weapon against Greece and the EU. In 2016 the EU has concluded an agreement with Turkey, however this agreement did not worked well. What are the main reasons behind this failure?

**TK:** Actually, it was not an agreement but a joint declaration. There is no legal bidding mechanism, only the prerequisites for EU funding. But, as we know, President Erdogan is



using the absence of a legal bidding mechanism for pressing for more funds and the so called Turkey- Schengen framework. Furthermore, after the failed coup of July 2016, Erdogan changed his policy and stance against EU and the West. Finally, another issue is the lack of cooperation on behalf of the Turkish authorities and mainly the gendarmerie and off course the use of immigrants to create tensions with Greece, with the most characteristic example, the crisis in Evros during March 2020. That's why from a small number of arrivals on April to June 2016 we have reached the present situation.

**TK:** For Greece, the security-migration nexus is an issue of great concern. Turkey is well aware of that, and presses Greece by various ways. At the same time, there are several institutions and many MPs around Europe that they do not share Greece's legitimate concerns. Do you believe that Turkey counts on this fact and uses Europe's humanitarian concerns against Europe's security concerns in the longer run? By doing that, what are the benefits for Ankara?

“ *The concept of Europe that protects the border, but also respects international law and human rights emerges and Greece plays an important role to this* ”

First of all I want to highlight the false distinction between security and human rights in the case of migration. We need to understand that migration flows is a humanitarian, but a security issue too. And is not only an issue of national security, but also of human security. For example the model of non-organized camps like Moria where the immigrants are spending more than a year it was not something that goes along with human rights and international law and the protection of human life. Apart from this, the role of organized criminal groups is at the epicenter of the migration cycle. We should not forget that states like Turkey or Belarus are using migration population as means to create tensions, crises and destabilize other countries (Greece, Lithuania, and Poland). To this end, Migration is also a security issue. The crisis in Evros was a major sift for EU policy on migration and the parameter of security. The concept of Europe that protects the border, but also

“ We need to understand that migration flows is a humanitarian, but a security issue too ”

respects international law and human rights emerges and Greece plays an important role to this. We see this new perception to other countries, i.e. the Baltic States, especially after the use of migration from Belarus. Turkey is instrumental sing migrants in a framework of hybrid operations. Its attempt is to push migrants and to use fake news and other disinformation tools in order to push Greece either to receive a big number of illegal migrants, which could create tension within the society and the political system, or to present Greece as a black sheep who does not care about immigrants and international law. We observe also pressure from MEP's and NGO's. They are activists and their main mundus operandi is pressing governments and authorities. But they should realise that countries like Turkey are playing a really bad role, especially



using fake news and pushing immigrants and not in favor of despair people.

**GR DR:** Greece is not the only country in Europe which suffers by mass illegal migration flows. Italy, for instance, has growing numbers of illegal entries during the last two years. According to your opinion, what is still missing from a realistic and feasible EU plan to tackle illegal migration?

**TK:** Good point. Yes, Italy, Malta, but also Spain is among the front line states. The life cycle of migration in the Mediterranean highlights this circularity of flows from the one road to another. First of all there is a need for a global response, without handling the root causes is not easy to manage migration flows. Secondly, there is a need for better coordination and streamline between different EU policies, especially since EU is counting a lot on the external dimension of migration management. The case of Libya is an important example where the lack of coordination between migration and foreign and security policy turns the country to a black hole and opens the central Mediterranean route. We need a new and bidding strategy for the third states that are crucial players for migration management (i.e. Turkey). Also, if we want to have an effective policy we need to move from the lowest common denominator and decisions that are not implemented from all the Member States (i.e. reallocation of refugees) to more bidding decision making procedures, even under the Qualified Majority Voting system. Without the cooperation of Turkey, for example, is not easy to dismantle the organized criminal groups of smuggling and trafficking. Finally, we need an independent and fully operational FRONTEX. ■

“ First of all there is a need for a global response, without handling the root causes is not easy to manage migration flows ”

