

Financial Times

March 20, 2016 6:57 pm

The EU sells its soul to strike a deal with Turkey



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It will be interesting to see whether the bloc reneges on its promises if Ankara fails to deliver



[©Getty](#) Turkey's prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, left, announces the deal with the EU last week, alongside Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker

The EU had two assets I have always considered unassailable, however much I may have questioned various decisions. The first is a lack of alternatives. How else can Europeans confront climate change, a refugee crisis or an over-assertive Russian president if not through the EU?

The second is the moral high ground. Compared with the majority of its member states, the EU is less corrupt, more principled and rules-driven. Whereas the world of national politics is full of tacticians out to seek short-term gain, the bloc manages a better mix of politics and policies. It builds broad coalitions and formulates strategic policy objectives. Its horizon extends beyond the life of a parliament.

Within a few years those assets have been demolished. The mismanagement of the eurozone crisis made it possible to formulate a rational economic argument for an exit.

Then, on Friday the EU lost its other key asset. The [deal with Turkey](#) is as sordid as anything I have seen in modern European politics. On the day that EU leaders signed the deal, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#), the Turkish president, gave the game away: "Democracy, freedom and

the rule of law . . . For us, these words have absolutely no value any longer.” At that point, the European Council should have ended the conversation with Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish prime minister, and sent him home. But instead they made a deal with him — money and a lot more in return for help with the refugee crisis.

Turkey will relocate some 72,000 refugees to the EU — a one-for-one swap for every illegal immigrant whom the Turks pick up on smuggler boats in the Aegean Sea. In return, the EU is paying Turkey €6bn and opening up a new chapter in EU accession negotiations — this with a country whose leadership has just abrogated democracy. The EU is further set to allow visa-free travel to 75m inhabitants of Turkey. The EU not only sold its soul that day, it actually negotiated a pretty lousy deal.

I am not in a position to judge whether this deal complies with the Geneva Convention and other parts of international law. I assume that the European Council has made sure it would stand up in court. But even if it is judged to be legal, I have doubts whether it can be implemented. It will be interesting to watch whether the EU will renege on its promises to Turkey if Ankara fails to deliver.

Even if the deal is implemented in full, it will not lighten the pressure much. The expected number of refugees making their way into the EU will be a large multiple of the 72,000 agreed with Turkey. [A German think-tank has done the maths](#) on refugee flows for this year and has come up with an estimated range of 1.8m-6.4m. The latter figure is a worst-case scenario that would include large numbers from Northern Africa.

The closure of the west Balkan route for refugees — from Greece through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and then into Austria and Germany — brought short-term relief to north Europeans but there are numerous alternative routes refugees can take. They can go through the Caucasus and the Ukraine, or through the Mediterranean into Italy and Spain. If countries close their borders, they do not reduce the stream of refugees but simply divert them. It is a classic example of a beggar-thy-neighbour policy. This shows that the case for anchoring refugee policy at EU level is overwhelming.

One of the most egregious cases of unilateral action is Austria’s border closures. The country will now reintroduce controls at its main border post to Italy — on the Brenner motorway. This is one of the busiest routes between southern and northern Europe. Once the refugees arrive in Italy, expect more action at its northern borders. France, Switzerland and Slovenia can be counted on to reintroduce controls at that point. Italy would then be cut off from the Schengen passport-free travel area, of which it is a member, and Schengen would become a small club of north European countries — possibly a model for a future eurozone. This would be the first step in the fragmentation of the EU.

The agreement with Turkey will also have an impact on the UK referendum debate. Would the camp in favour of leaving the EU not have something to say about visa-free travel for 75m Turks? Anyone who cares about democracy and human rights will hate this deal. So will anyone who fears German dominance of the EU, since it was initiated by Angela Merkel. The German chancellor needed it badly to get her out of a hole of her own making. It was her unilateral decision to open Germany’s borders that turned a manageable refugee crisis into an unmanageable one.

It is not easy to make a purely rational case for Britain's exit from the EU. But when the EU loses its moral high ground, we should not be surprised that people begin to question what it stands for, and why it is needed.

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COMMENTS (210)

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Steve Westburn 45 minutes ago

Agree fully that the deal is disgraceful, the EU has behaved despicably and foolishly. But, if you read the notes to the Independent report of Erdogan's words, you will see that you have swallowed a serious mistranslation of his words, coming from the DPA and later Russia today.

An astute Turk writes there:

"As much as I am fervently opposed to Erdogan and his ruling clique of ultranationalist thugs and spineless sycophants, this is simply very bad journalism. Independent is taking a poor translation of the speech and then taking it further out of context.

"The correct translation of what he said would be "Nobody raises an eyebrow when France puts in place emergency measures after suffering a terror attack, but when we do it they preach us freedom and democracy. These statements have no longer any value in Turkey."

"We're suffering so much from poor journalism in Turkey that it depresses me to see similar practices in the West. What Erdogan's doing to Turkey is deplorable. But you simply play into his hand when you distort his words like this."