

Review: Greece, Turkey and the international refugee situation 1-3 November 2017

*The entry for Thursday 2 November focuses heavily on numbers, largely because Greece's Minister for Migration, Yiannis Mouzalas, told gathered media – including journalists from Reuters and AP, which in turn means every media outlet on Earth which receives wire stories from one or both (which is almost every media outlet on Earth) – that more than **SIX times** as many people had arrived in Greece in 2017, as have actually arrived.*

With this wild 'mistake', which has now been repeated by international news media, as inspiration, I thought it would be sensible to share with you the actual, accurate figures for the year so far. Standard figures (with updates on accommodation) will feature below:

Total number of people to have crossed the Mediterranean, 1 January–1 November 2017: **154,280**

Of which (arrivals in);

- Italy: **116,600**
- Greece: **24,413**
- Spain: **12,240**
- Cyprus: **847**

Total deaths on the Mediterranean so far this year (to 2 November): **2,087**

Arrivals (to Greece) in:

- July: **2,009**
- August: **3,584**
- September: **4,310**
- October: **4,034**

Average number of new arrivals in Greece by day, to 1 November 2017: **77.5**

Average number of new arrivals in Greece, per day, to 1 August 2017: **65.6**

Average number of new arrivals in Greece by day, in:

- July: **64**
- August: **115**
- September: **143.6**
- October: **130**

Aegean island detention centres. (format - *Capacity; current population*)

- Lesbos (two centres); **3,500; 7,957**
- Chios (one centre, one closed; Souda, 24 October); **1,200; 2,197**
- Samos; **850; 2,418**
- Leros; **1,000; 1,010**
- Kos; **1,000; 1,162**

*(Note that government estimates are widely regarded by those 'in the field' as underestimates by one-two in every ten people at present. Therefore there may be as many as **1,600** more people in Lesbos, than the Greek government estimates...)*

Number of **empty buildings** in Greece (according to the Hellenic Valuation Institute): **500,000**

New arrivals by sea, 31 October – 2 November: Aegean islands.

Lesvos, **201**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **9,747**. Chios, **0**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **6,356**.

Samos, **0**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **4,490**. Leros, **0**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **490**.

Kos, **7**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **780**. Tilos, **41**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **227**.

Kastellorizo, **0**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **1,291**. Others, **0**. Total arrivals since 1 January: **1,034**

Total sea arrivals since 1 January 2017: 24,415

Total sea arrivals since 1 August 2017: 12,473

Total sea arrivals 31 Oct-2 Nov: 208 – down **213** on 27-30 Oct

Total summer sea arrivals (1 June – 30 September): 11,909

Relocations from the islands, 31 October – 2 November

Lesvos, **72**. Total relocations since 15 August, **2,474**.

Chios, **43**. Total relocations since 15 August **2,494**.

Samos, **8**. Total relocations since 15 August **1,804**.

Leros, **20**. Total relocations since 25 August **470**. Kos, **8**. Total relocations since 15 August **1,615**.

Others, **5**. Total relocations since 25 August **838**.

Total relocations since 15 August: **9,695** - **156** since 30 October

Total number of people on the islands: **15,189**

Total refugee numbers in Greece: 63,314 (1 August).

Islands: **15,189** – up 111 on 30 October (**2 November**)

Mainland: **46,948. (1 August)**

Of which: **35,348** in permanent/semi-permanent camps. (**1 August**)

235 in 'reception and identification centre'. **3,676** in 'pre-removal centres'. (**1 August**)

8,250, 'self-settled' (government estimate); **8,672** 'housed' by 'civil society organisations' (government estimate) including camps and 'accommodation'. (**1 August**)

15,193 in accommodation: **13,465** in apartments; **248** in hotels; **12** with host families; **1,468** in facilities for unaccompanied minors (**at 31 October**)



Wednesday 1 November

- 1) Greece – refugees. Tsipras and Mouzalas face Syriza criticism for refugee response; Greek court rules police ‘wrong’ to imprison refugee; Afghan refugee protest continues on Lesbos; ‘more than 50,000 people’ travelled from Turkey to Greece since March 2016**

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, and Minister for Migration Yiannis Mouzalas have been fiercely criticised at a Syriza internal meeting, for their mishandling of the refugee response.

They were – reasonably – criticised for having failed to ‘absorb’ funding for the response, and ensure it arrived where it was needed, as well as for detaining 14,000 men, women and children against their will on the Greek islands, and for the abysmal living conditions at refugee camps all over Greece, including the mainland as well as the islands.

They could also have mentioned that five people died and many others were hospitalised, when the Greek government refused to winterise camps in 2016, that refugees have been trapped in camps for well over 19 months, and that the government – now in the response’s third year – is planning to reopen a camp at Katsikas, Epirus, in the middle of this winter.

Mouzalas told the critics ‘if you think I am doing everything wrong, then I will resign.’

But this is an empty threat, as he is in any case, Greece’s nominee for EU Human Rights Commissioner.

Tsipras conceded that there have been serious problems with the response, but that those were not the fault of Mouzalas. He did not suggest whose fault they might be, and it is worth noting that as Migration Minister, Mouzalas has insisted on complete control (which he has not always received) of the entire refugee response in Greece: <https://www.thenationalherald.com/180053/syriza-dissidents-rip-tsipras-mouzalas-refugees-plight/>

A Greek court in Myteline, Lesbos, has found that the Greek police were wrong to attempt to deport a Syrian man to Turkey on the grounds that it thought he might try to escape the island.

The man was arrested on 11 October, and immediately said he intended to file for international protected status. But by 13 October the police chose to start deportation proceedings against him instead.

He may now remain on Lesbos, but cannot leave the island:

<http://www.immigration.gr/2017/11/blog-post.html?m=1>

The ongoing protest by Afghan refugees against their extraordinarily long detention at Moria Detention Centre, the awful standard of living at the camp, and the increasing tensions caused by overcrowding and shortages of food and water, especially now winter is coming, is now in its 12th day. The refugees are still sleeping at Sappho Square, Myteline:

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=540613932951364&id=100010082855510

More than 50,000 men, women and children have crossed from Turkey to Greece since the EU/Turkey Deal began in March 2016, and up to 6 September this year, 1,896 have been deported back: <https://qz.com/1116082/the-eu-turkey-deal-has-returned-just-3-of-thousands-of-migrants-stranded-in-greece/>

2) Greece – economy, politics, society. Greece drops in ‘business ease’ survey; ‘wages low, taxes high’ claims Greek migrant; Norway-Greece sign MoU; energy trio gain new right of exploration; Cyprus talks ‘after February’

Greece has dropped to 67th out of 190 states in the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business 2018’ report, from 61st last year.

Ekathimerini, which notes that Greece’s performance has dropped on six out of 11 criteria from last year, notes that just two of these are based on the actual cost of doing business in Greece, but chooses regardless to lead with the fact that businesses must spend 51.7 per cent of their earnings on tax, compared to 40.1 per cent as the average across developed states.

Gaining electricity connections, and the safeguarding of creditors, were also listed as significant concerns: <http://www.ekathimerini.com/222844/article/ekathimerini/business/doing-business-gets-even-harder-in-greece>

Almost half of all the people hired in Greece in 2017 so far earn less than €400. This article follows a Greek man, Stathis Stasinopoulos, who left Athens to set up a business in Bremen, Germany, saying that taxes are too high for new businesses to survive.

In fact, his story is that he did qualify for tax rebates, but that these were not paid, that restrictions on bank transfers stifled his capacity to increase exports, and his and other Greek firms were ordered to pay tax on earnings they had not yet made, but were predicted to make.

These are less political problems, than financial ones. Greece struggles even to pay its public service employees regularly, while higher taxes have been consistently demanded by the EU and IMF as part of the bail-out agreements Greece has been pushed to make, while lack of money – and the fear that people would take their cash out of the economy altogether – is the major factor behind limits on banking transactions.

All of these are serious issues for business people – and for Greece as a whole as it struggles to recover from economic disaster and years of austerity and urgently needs investment – but simply

claiming 'tax' is to blame is to simplify the issue beyond the point at which it makes sense:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/greece-finally-growing-but-taxes-crushing-new-businesses/2017/10/31/7a931db6-be3a-11e7-9294-705f80164f6e_story.html?utm_term=.6b88362a754f

Norway and Greece have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on renewed economic cooperation, which could be worth €116.7bn. Job creation and business development will be included, while Norway's Minister of EEA and EU Affairs Marit Berger Røsland says the deal will 'create opportunities' for Norwegian businesses.

She added: 'Greece is still the first stop for many migrants and refugees who are trying to reach Europe. European countries share a responsibility to find good solutions to this situation. It is therefore both important and right for Norway to continue its cooperation with Greece to deal with one of the greatest challenges Europe is currently facing.'

<https://reliefweb.int/report/greece/norway-strengthening-cooperation-greece>

French firm Total, Italian company Edison, and Greece's Hellenic Petroleum, have signed a lease on a block of land in the Ionian Sea, for oil exploration work. The trio was granted the contract for exploration and exploitation of the nation's oil supplies in October 2016, but the lease is a next step towards the process: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-energy-greece/total-edison-sign-lease-for-oil-and-gas-exploration-off-greece-idUSKBN1D026R>

Greek-Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades says that talks on the future of Cyprus will restart after his state's presidential elections in February 2018.

He added that it was wrong of the UN's Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was wrong to blame both Greek and Turkish Cypriots for the failure of this year's talks to attempt to end the split, because '(he did not) place the blame squarely on Turkey and the Turkish side.' Which is helpful: <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/10/31/turkey-ready-talk-security-elections-kasoulides-says/>

3) Refugees. Manus island water, electricity, stopped, refugees won't leave; UNHCR confirms they must stay as alternatives 'not ready'; at least four people drown attempting to reach Bangladesh from Myanmar/Burma

Water and electricity have been cut at the Manus Island detention centre, an Australian facility in Papua New Guinea, where 773 people are currently trapped. No food has been distributed since Sunday. The Papua New Guinean government ruled that the centre was illegal, so Australia's government proposed to close it down and move the refugees to other locations in PNG.

However, the refugees say they fear for their lives, fears which appear to be backed up by the chief of the local police force saying he cannot guarantee the refugees' safety. As a result, the people are refusing to leave the centre, and argue that they should be transferred to Australia while the asylum applications are considered.

PNG Police Chief Superintendent Dominic Kakas said his officers will not force the men from the centre, but Daniel Webb, from Australia's Human Rights Law Centre, said: 'They are terrified, it's not about the facilities, it's about their safety. These men are terrified of violence if they stay in the detention centre and they are terrified of violence if they leave.'

The PNG Supreme Court has received an injunction on the closure, which is said to be an attempt to prevent it from taking place, but Australian Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said: 'the constant

claims of the IMAs ('illegal maritime arrivals') and advocates about their situation in Manus are nothing more than subterfuge.

'They have long claimed the Manus RPC was a 'hellhole' -- but the moment it was to be closed they demanded it to be kept open.'

Of course, the refugees' thoughts on Manus have changed little, but they feel that what they are now being forced to do, is worse.

The centre opened in 2001, when John Howard was Australian Prime Minister, and was designed to ensure that all refugees did not reach the Australian state, but were instead processed offshore.

The Labor government closed it in 2008, but it reopened in 2012, as greater numbers of people started to try to reach Australia. The refugees have been there since 2015, since when Australia's politicians have argued that they should not close the centre because to do so would be to 'encourage' other refugees to come.

In Greece, the Eastern Aegean islands have been serving a similar purpose, despite damning UN and aid organisations' reports about both Manus and the island detention centres off the Greek coast: <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/31/asia/manus-island-refugees-closed/index.html>

And UNHCR has warned that the 'alternative' detention centres in PNG to which the Australian government insists it will move the refugees, are not ready, meaning that they will have to stay at the original centre, without water or electricity. It's hard to accept that the Australian government did not know that the alternatives were not yet ready: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/01/manus-island-un-says-new-accommodation-not-ready-for-refugees>

At least four people have drowned in the last 24 hours, while trying to cross from Rakhine state, Myanmar/Burma, to Bangladesh. Their boat sank 10 km from its destination, after a 24 hour journey. Several others of the boat's 40 passengers are in critical condition. 607,000 men, women and children have fled Myanmar/Burma, where the armed forces are attacking them and burning their homes, for Bangladesh since 25 August: <https://www.voanews.com/a/several-rohingya-refugees-drown-trying-to-reach-bangladesh/4093842.html>

4) Turkey – state to re-start daylight saving next year;

The Turkish government has announced it will reintroduce Daylight Saving Time on 28 October 2018. The state abandoned the practice last Autumn, refusing to join the rest of the world in turning the clocks back one hour. It was joined in this by Northern Cyprus, but this year the latter decided to return to the DST system, meaning Turkey was alone in its non-recognition of the practice. It will turn its clocks back one hour on 28 October, along with all European states: <https://www.timeanddate.com/news/time/turkey-new-dst-2018.html>

5) Kurdish referendum – Iraqi troops take positions on Kurdish region (and Iraq's) borders with Turkey, Syria

Iraqi troops have taken a position on the Turkish border with the Iraqi-Kurdish region. The border between Turkey and Iraq has been entirely controlled by the Kurdish region (on the Iraq side) since the region was set up in the 1990s.

But the soldiers have taken a position and are setting up a checkpoint at Habur gate, between the Turkish and Kurdish checkpoint, which means vehicles attempting to cross will now be checked three times, by Turkish, Iraqi and Kurdish troops.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi demanded Iraqi control of the border with Turkey and Iran (some of which is also in the Kurdish region) and has acted as a response to the Kurdish region's independence referendum of 25 September.

The border with Turkey is of particular importance to the Kurdish region, because the region's major income source – oil – passes the border through the major north-bound Iraqi oil pipeline. However, al-Abadi also promised that his government would 'soon' start paying the salaries of Kurdish Peshmerga and civil service employees, which is itself a less than encouraging image of the realities of life in the region at present.

Hoshyar Zebari, a former Iraqi Foreign Minister now working as an advisor to the region's government, said; 'The region is prepared to have Iraqis at the airports and border posts to have oversight, to make sure everyone is in compliance, but this must be achieved through negotiations, not force.'

It is hard to see what the region can do in the face of such force, however:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-turkey/iraqi-authorities-gain-first-foothold-at-kurdish-frontier-with-turkey-idUSKBN1D00SQ?il=0>

6) Syria – Russian attempt to 'side-line' Geneva halted; Iran, Russia, sign mutually-beneficial deals; Raqqa 'will be considered occupied' until Syrian army takes it: Assad aide

A Russian attempt to de-rail UN-led peace talks in Geneva, which are due to start on 28 November, appear to have failed.

Russia had proposed talks on 18 November in Sochi, to which no Western states would be invited, instead involving just it, Iran, Turkey, the Syrian rebel delegation and Syrian Kurdish representatives.

But the rebel delegation (which includes some Kurds) has announced it will not attend, and the Turkish government says it will not take part in talks to which Kurdish representatives, but not its allies, have been invited. Iran and Turkey had previously agreed to 'discuss' the talks, which are a clear attempt for Russia to 'take a lead' on the situation in Syria, perhaps in an environment where it would be by far the most powerful player.

It is thought that Russia would, at the Sochi talks, have announced a 'new' Syrian constitution. Bashar al Assad had agreed to the Sochi plan, indicating that the constitution would have entrenched him in power before any UN talks commenced in Geneva:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/01/syrian-opposition-refuses-to-attend-russian-peace-talks>

Iran and Russia have signed a series of deals bringing the Assad-supporting allies closer, including a deal between Russian state energy company Rosneft and the National Iranian Oil Company to build oil and gas projects worth \$30bn.

The deal, and the state visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin, are a mark of Russia's intent – already being realised in its Syria combat position – to increase its importance in global terms, and Iran's desire to have a powerful ally in the face of increased US pressure:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/iran-putin-syria-centre-stage-171101072525029.html>

The government of Bashar al-Assad has declared that Raqqa, which was liberated from IS by Kurdish and Syrian fighters backed by the US, will be considered 'occupied' until taken by Syrian fighters loyal to Assad.

The move comes only a fortnight after the city was liberated, in an embarrassment to Assad and Russia who had aimed to announce the liberation of Deir ez Zour from IS (still not completed) before the SDF achieved the freeing of Raqqa, IS' Syrian capital.

It also comes less than a month since Assad promised Kurdish people in Syria talks on greater independence, leading to speculation that the Iraqi government's swift gains against the Iraqi Kurdish region in the wake of the latter's independence referendum of 25 September, may have convinced Assad to attempt a similar 'crackdown'.

Nothing has yet convinced the US to enter the war in Syria, and it seems unlikely that this will do, but it may strengthen the SDF, which had been at some risk of destabilising and disintegrating in the aftermath of the liberation of Raqqa and offers of greater Kurdish independence from Assad.

A Syrian official, who said he was expressing a 'personal view' argued that the Syrian army will also be used to fight SDF forces for oil fields East of Deir Ez Zour (a similar source of embarrassment, as they were taken in a fraction of the time the as yet unfinished removal of IS from the city has taken).

Once again, this will possibly strengthen the major alliance remaining against Assad in Syria, at a point where it looked as if it may have broken apart with little pressure:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds-analysis/assad-sets-sights-on-kurdish-areas-risking-new-syria-conflict-idUSKBN1D02CN?il=0>

7) Qatar – New US-Qatar cooperation; Bahrain refuses to attend 'any summit' Qatar will attend; Bahrain to impose visa restrictions on Qataris; al Jazeera celebrates 21st 'birthday', points out governments want it closed

US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin has announced that the US and Qatar will work more closely together on counter-terrorism measures, during a visit to the state. He is the second high-ranking US government member to visit Qatar in as many weeks, following Rex Tillerson, who said that Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt were 'at fault' over the blockade of Qatar, which began on 5 June.

The blockaders argued that Qatar's funding of 'terrorism' (in fact, the Muslim Brotherhood) was one reason the four gave for their act. Mnuchin is also set to visit Saudi Arabia and UAE on this round of diplomacy, which he says is designed to cut funding for terror groups:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/treasury-secretary-praises-cooperation-qatar-171031082333065.html>

Bahrain's King Hamad ibn Isa al Khalifa says his country will not attend any summits to which Qatar is also invited unless the latter 'corrects its approach, comes to its senses, and responds to the demands of the countries that suffered so much from its policies.'

www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/bahrain-boycott-summits-attended-qatar-king-171030194918427.html

Bahrain News Agency BNA has announced the state will impose entry visa requirements on all Qatari citizens (the first time in the states' history that this has happened) 'for security reasons'. Qatar's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ali Khalfan Al Mansouri, responded: 'the visas constitute a flagrant violation of the agreements and resolutions of the Gulf Cooperation Council. These measures are completely contrary to the statements of officials of the siege countries not to harm the Qatari citizen when taking any steps in the context of this crisis.'

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bahrain-security-qatar/bahrain-imposes-entry-visas-on-qatar-nationals-residents-idUSKBN1D02BR>

Al Jazeera has marked its 21st 'birthday' amid – as it points out – calls by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and some others, for it to be closed down. It started broadcasting on 1 November 1996, since when a variety of states, including the US and Israel, as well as Saudi Arabia and UAE, all of whom have quite different political stances, have complained that it has promoted messages against their interests.

Its offices in Kabul, Baghdad and Gaza have all been bombed, with the bombing in Baghdad the subject of ongoing arguments about whether US forces deliberately (and illegally) targeted it. Its immediate closure was one of the 13 demands made by Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt when they launched their ongoing blockade of Qatar: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/al-jazeera-marks-21st-anniversary-closure-calls-171031182324633.html>

8) Hamas – handover of border crossings to Palestinian Authority

Hamas has handed control of the border crossings between the Gaza Strip and Egypt and Israel, to the Palestinian Authority. It is the first step of a deal signed between the former rival groups on 11 October, which is designed to 'reunite' Gaza and the West Bank. The two 'split' politically, when Hamas was elected in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank, and the two refused to work with one another.

Gaza has been blockaded by Israel for more than a decade, including a tight control on food and liquid allowed into the region, to 'control' the calorie intake of the men, women and children there. Its two million residents have only a couple of hours of electricity and water each day. However, despite Hamas' politicians agreeing to the deal with the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority, the group also has a 25,000 member military component, which has so far refused to say whether it will lay down its weapons: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/01/hamas-hand-over-control-of-crossings-to-palestinian-authority>

Thursday 2 November

- 1) Greece – Refugees. Another change to island policy 'announced'; hunger strike, protest, enters second day at Syntagma Square, Athens; MOUZALAS and NUMBERS: minister cites series of incorrect statistics about refugee response, uses incorrect stats to 'justify' awful treatment of refugees; correct numbers. Mouzalas says government 'looking for' homes for refugees, but they may have to live on ships; says EU/Turkey deal 'remains important; Epirus arrest of 'people smuggler'**

At the Athens general co-ordination meeting, the Ministry of Migration's representatives admit that their plans to relocate 1,000 refugees from the islands, as announced on 24 October as a target to be achieved by 31 October, has not been met. In fact, 366 people were moved in that week. The announcement signifies that 'geographical restrictions' are now back in place on the islands, so that only those people regarded as 'at particular risk' will now be moved.

It is hard to see whether this is an admission by the government that its accommodation scheme (under which refugees were supposed to be provided with decent places to live, rather than trapped in camps and detention centres) has failed, or just a guess that as winter advances, fewer people will attempt to cross the Aegean to the islands.

If it is the latter, it is an alarming signal that the government is happy with detention centres that are at 2-4 times their capacity, and for the people there to have to attempt to survive another winter in tents.

Dozens of refugees, almost all from Syria, and almost all women and children, are now in the second day of a protest at Syntagma Square, Athens.



They are camping at the Square in the centre of the city, and have embarked on a hunger strike, because they wish – after a two-year wait, in some cases – to be reunited with their families, who already live in other EU nations.

The entire relocation programme in the EU has been and still is riddled with failures, and must be immediately

fixed, but the family reunifications issue has the added factor that it is actively keeping apart parents from their children (as well as couples who love one another, siblings, etc.) for years at a time. In the case of children aged 4-8, this means that the wait to see their mother or father has been a significant portion of their life, and a period of growing which can never be made up for once it is missed.

This is not only extraordinarily cruel, it is also quite likely to result in psychological complications further down the line, which will have to be addressed by the same nations who are now refusing families the right to live together.

As noted here in previous updates, there is some evidence to suggest that the German and Greek governments (in fact, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel and Greek Minister of Migration Yiannis Mouzalas) have colluded to ‘slow’ the rate at which families can be reunited in Germany. Mouzalas has been named Greece’s EU Commissioner for Human Rights.

<https://www.neweurope.eu/article/refugees-athens-protest-family-reunification-germany/>

➤ **Mouzalas and numbers**

This is the same story, but in Reuters. I am including it here because it states that 148,084 refugees have arrived in Greece from Turkey ‘this year’.

This claim has been repeated in all stories on this topic (because of the way news wire services work: very few, if any, of these news sites have sent journalists to Syntagma Square, they have instead paid Reuters for content, and this is a story they have chosen to run under that service. There is nothing wrong with that per se. No-one can afford to have reporters hanging around in every square in every city on Earth in case something happens. But it does lead to errors like this).

But it is wildly inaccurate. The actual number of people who have arrived by sea from Turkey to Greece is 24,299 as of 31 October. The number to have crossed by land is far smaller.

We can demonstrate this with the following two points. First, there are around 63,000 refugees in Greece at present. The EU relocation scheme has relocated just 19,747 people from Greece in the

last two years, while the EU/Turkey Deal has seen almost 1,900 people forced back to Turkey and the IOM 'grants for moving' scheme has sent 2,084 people back.

Which means that 23,731 people have been 'moved' from Greece (in the last two years, not one), and 63,000 people are here now. But supposedly 148,084 people arrived this year, leaving a 'gap' of 61,353 – almost as many again as the number of refugees actually in Greece now.

Those of us of a cynical bent might argue that this response has actually lost or deliberately undercounted the number of refugees in Greece to a factor of two, but this is being presented as an official figure, rather than an estimate. It is simply wrong.

Added to this, the Reuters piece itself notes that the number of refugees to have entered Greece in September – 214 people each day, on average – is the highest of the year so far.

But that number is wrong, because in fact 143.6 people arrived per day, on average, in September, to Greece; a total of 4310 people.

Even if it were correct (and it is not, for Greece), if we add that number – 6,420 – to the combined averages the article cites for March (1,736), July (2,697), and August (4,836) we are left with a total of 15,689.

Given that October is not counted in this sequence, that means that in the five months January, February, April, May, June 2017, there would have had to have been a total of 132,215 people arriving in a total of 150 days – on average 881.4 people every single day. Even if we add October to that equation, we would be left with an average arrival rate of 730.1 people every day.

Which simply hasn't happened.

Nor can this be the figure for 2016 and 2017 so far, as 182,500 people arrived in Greece in January-December 2016, while 24,299 people have arrived in 2017.

Neither can it be the figure for October-October, as by 23 October 2016, 169,302 of the 182,500 arrivals were already in Greece, leaving just 13,198 still to arrive (a significantly higher figure than is likely to arrive this month and next month), meaning the total for the 12 months November – November is 37,497.

In actual fact, the number 148,084 is the UNHCR count for the total number of people to have crossed the Mediterranean in the period 1 January-31 October 2017. That includes all crossings from North Africa to Italy (116,000), Spain (11,000), Cyprus (800) and Greece (24,299).

(The same mistake has been made to come to the '214 people per day' figure in September, above, which, as we will note below, is because Yiannis Mouzalas deliberately shared this figure, and the 148,084 number, rather than the correct ones, with the Greek media and Reuters.)

Yet because the Reuters piece clearly states that 148,084 people have crossed from Turkey to Greece this year, because the Greek Migration Minister Yiannis Mouzalas told them they did, even though they haven't, every story on this topic now carries this mistake:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece/refugees-in-greece-demand-transfer-to-germany-start-hunger-strike-idUSKBN1D14UQ>; <http://www.dw.com/en/refugees-protest-in-greece-for-family-reunification-in-germany/a-41199376>

As a result, I feel it's worth us reviewing the actual UNHCR estimates of the number of people to have arrived in Europe across the Mediterranean, since 1 January 2017 (now to 2 November).

They are:

- Italy – 116,600
- Spain – 12,420

(Spain and Italy's figures are almost exclusively people who have travelled from North Africa, though of course their journeys began in many cases, far further afield than that)

- Cyprus – 847
- Greece – 24,413

Total number of crossings: 154,280

The total number of deaths so far this year (all routes combined) is 2,806.

By comparison, the total crossing numbers in 2016 were 362,753 people (5,096 deaths), in 2015, 1,015,078 (3,771 deaths) and in 2014, 216,054 (3,538 dead).

Greece's Migration Policy Minister Yiannis Mouzalas admits Greece is finding the refugee situation 'more difficult to manage' as numbers of refugees crossing the Aegean have increased in the last two months.

But he has also used inaccurate figures as part of his 'excuse' for the state of the refugee response in Greece.

He described the situation at Chios as 'bad' and Lesbos as 'very bad' (as the overcrowding at Leros is worse than at Chios, and at Samos more than twice as bad* as Lesbos, it would be interesting to see where he believes the two fit on that 'scale').

It certainly is true to say that the number of people arriving on the Greek islands from Turkey has increased in September and October.

In September, an average of 143.6 people arrived per day: 4,310 people arrived in total.

In October, an average of 130 people arrived each day: a total of 4,034.

In the rest of the year as a whole, 15,955 people arrived, an average of 65.6 per day. In August, the month in which the next highest number (3,584) arrived, the daily average was 115.

And in July, 2009 people arrived, 64 per day on average.

But.

It is worth noting that when Mouzalas claims that the number of people arriving 'more than doubled', he is correct, but he is deliberately using figures not for Greece, but for entries to the EU as a whole.

It *is* reasonable to point out that asylum services and border teams might be stretched as a result, and it is *also* reasonable to claim that the majority of that increase has come in Greece (perhaps because of greater EU efforts to stop people travelling from North Africa to Italy, including by some deeply immoral and suspect methods, such as helping the Libyan coastguard shoot boats out of the water).

But it is simply incorrect to pretend that the number of people to have arrived in Greece in September was an average of 214 people per day, as Mouzalas claims, because this would mean that more than 2,000 more people had arrived in September than actually did: the difference between

Mouzalas' claim of 214 per day and the actual figure of 143.6 per day is the difference between 6,420 people having arrived in September, and the actual figure of 4,310.

And this is absolutely vital, because it means that the Greek Migration Minister has pretended that close to 50 per cent more people arrived in Greece than actually arrived, and is using that as the excuse for the abominable living conditions on the Greek islands, and across the mainland.

We should also note that 'a relatively high number of new arrivals' (and 4,310 in September and 4,030 in October is a relatively high number) is not an excuse for the absolutely atrocious conditions in which people are being forced to live in the EU, in the 21st Century. Where, for example, there is water and electricity only a couple of hours per day.

Mouzalas has insisted from the start of the refugee response that the Greek government – and in particular his ministry – was capable of 'managing' the refugee response, and that foreign agencies were a nuisance to the effort.

Since 31 July, the Greek government (Mouzalas' department in particular) has had full control over all funding relating to the Aegean islands' response, and the result has been the non-renewal of humanitarian agencies' contracts, even as the humanitarian crisis continues (Yiatri Tou Kosmou, for example had its 15 person medical team on the island removed. It was replaced with two doctors and a nurse. There are more than 7,900 people at Kara Tepe and Moria).

Equally, the camps could have been emptied several times before September, but were instead left at capacity.

The fact is, that if you insist you can handle a crisis, demand control and are then given it, you cannot then pretend that your refusal to plan for different scenarios (for example, last Winter being cold, a higher number of people than you expected arriving in two of the last ten months) and your refusal to move people from the detention centres in which some of them have now been trapped for more than 19 months, is the fault of someone, or something, other than yourself.

But most importantly here, the Migration Minister of Greece has told the media that the number of refugees who have arrived in the whole of Europe, is in fact the number to have arrived only in Greece.

He told Reuters (above) that 148,084 people had arrived in Greece in 2017, so far, when in fact the figure is 24,299 for Greece (less than a sixth of the number he said), and 148,084 for the EU in total.

And he is arguing that 50 per cent more people have arrived in the last two months than actually arrived, and that this, rather than his own poor planning, is the reason people are being treated as less than human on the Aegean islands.

*(in terms of overcrowding rates – there are fewer refugees {2,418} on Samos, but its capacity {850} is less than a quarter of Lesbos'.

Lesbos has more than twice as many refugees, 7,957, as its capacity, 3,500, according to government estimates – in fact the number of people there is closer to 9,000 – but Samos has almost four times more people than its capacity):

[http://www.ekathimerini.com/222879/article/ekathimerini/news/concern-over-spike-of-200-percent-in-migrant-arrivals;](http://www.ekathimerini.com/222879/article/ekathimerini/news/concern-over-spike-of-200-percent-in-migrant-arrivals)

Greek Migration Minister Yiannis Mouzalas says that his department is attempting to find 'emergency housing' in Greece to help people in detention centres and refugee camps get through the winter.

The problem particularly centres on the largely un-winterised (despite last year's snows and deaths) and hugely overcrowded Aegean detention centres.

There are more than 4,000 empty buildings in Athens alone, and many thousands more across Greece. But there have been that number since before the refugee response began, and before Mouzalas' department began to push people into warehouse and open air refugee camps all over the country.

As a result of his department's failure to winterise the detention centres, move people to the mainland, or attempt to bring any of the huge number of empty buildings in Greece into operation, Mouzalas is now left hoping that municipal authorities will turn out to have tens of thousands of unused buildings all ready to be lived in, or, as he says, people will be forced to spend the winter living on ferries and military ships.

Note that this story, from AP, also notes that 'Migration Minister Yannis Mouzalas said Wednesday that average arrivals had jumped since mid-August from about 50 per day to more than 200.'

Which is (Mouzalas' claim) entirely untrue: <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-11-01/greece-mulls-emergency-housing-measures-after-migrant-spike>

Yiannis Mouzalas says that despite (his inaccurate relation of) the increase in refugee numbers in the last two months, the EU/Turkey Deal remains important, and is still being operated on both sides of the Aegean: <http://www.yenisafak.com/en/world/eu-turkey-refugee-deal-very-important-says-greece-2797332>

Late on Wednesday night, Greek police in Katsikas, Epirus, attempted to stop a vehicle, and were forced to follow it until it was halted at Bafra. The car was driven by a Greek man, who had been paid to transport four Iraqi refugees to the port of Igoumenitsa.

The report also notes that a Kurdish family, with children aged one and seven, and without paperwork, were left in Ioannina by a 'smuggler'.

The issue is of increasing concern in Ioannina because under Greek law, refugees can only access humanitarian aid – including shelter and food – if they have official paperwork issued to them by the Greek government, through the police.

But refugees who have landed at Igoumenitsa, or have been released from the port's detention centre, often do not have this paperwork, and are dropped – sometimes by police – in Ioannina.

Once there, they have to report to local police, who on a number of documented (by me and others) occasions are 'too busy' and request that the refugees return on another day.

The problem is that the refugees are then faced with having to spend several nights on the street, which is absolutely unreasonable, puts their health at risk, especially while winter sets in, and also leaves them vulnerable to arrest because it is illegal to sleep rough in Ioannina.

The only alternative at present is for aid agencies to offer shelter, but this, too, is illegal because the men, women and children do not have the correct papers, meaning that aid workers face a choice between breaking the law or forcing people onto the streets, while refugees face a choice between

attempting to break the law by finding a warm place to sleep, or breaking the law by sleeping on the street: <http://www.epiruspost.gr/reportaz/koinonia/47017-2017-11-01-20-30-52.html>

2) Greece – politics, economy, society. Plan to ‘swap debt’;

The Greek government says it plans to ‘swap’ debt worth €27.9bn, in preparation to re-enter international markets after August 2018, when its bail-out period is scheduled to end.

The bonds were issued in 2012, after an attempt to restructure Greek debt, but became a serious liability after the protracted collapse of the Greek economy continued, and it is hoped that by replacing them with new bonds, at an improved rate which reflects the ‘recovery’ of the Greek economy in the last 12 months, the government can boost both Greece’s ‘paper finances’ and the attractiveness of Greek bonds in general to outside investors:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-01/greece-is-said-to-plan-debt-swap-exercise-worth-eu30-billion>

3) Refugees – UK failure to relocate child refugees; Manus refugees forced to dig for water; Burundians afraid to return home; Shetland Islands plan; Uganda, UN, work on ‘co-ordination plan’; Cameroonians in danger after Ambazonia independence declaration

The UK has failed to relocate any child refugees from Greece and Italy. In the last year, just 200 child refugees have come to the UK, despite the fact that 280 places offered by local authorities (the UK’s Conservative government insists that local authorities must offer places before it, as the government, accepts refugees) remain empty: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/01/foster-carers-housing-lone-child-refugees-to-receive-specialist-training>

Refugees trapped at Manus Island detention centre, the Australian ‘processing centre’ on the Papua New Guinean island, are now digging for water. The refugees had their water and electricity turned off on Tuesday (31 October) and have had no food delivered since Saturday, because the Australian government wants to shut the camp and move them to another location on the island.

But the 770 men at the centre say they will not be safe in another location, and wish to remain there, or be moved to the Australian mainland. Meanwhile, UNHC says that the other locations are not ready to host people, meaning the refugees are now trapped without food, water and electricity, which is why they are now desperately digging to have anything to drink.

Meanwhile, New Zealand, which has repeatedly offered to relocate 150 people from the camp, has repeated its offer. Australia has repeatedly turned the offer down, which is believed to be because Australia, which refuses to allow anyone onto its mainland who has tried to travel there by boat, fears more refugees will arrive if there are proven ways for people to be relocated:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-41840549>

Burundian refugees say they are afraid to return to their homeland, despite efforts by the state’s President, Pierre Nkurunziza, and the governments of some of the refugees’ host countries, to ‘encourage them’ to return.

More than 400,000 people fled Burundi after violence broke out in 2015, when Nkurunziza announced he was set to break his state’s constitution by running for a third term as President. They are now living in Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania. More than 240,000 of them are now in Tanzania.

Nkurunziza made his first state visit outside of Burundi since 2015, to Tanzania, in July this year. He said that the state was now safe and the violence was over. Despite warnings from within Burundi,

including from armed opposition groups, that this was not true, the Tanzanian government began a 'voluntary returns' process, which IOM has been helping to operate.

But this report finds that Burundian refugees – many of who were attacked and tortured in Burundi – still fear what awaits them at 'home'.

Jacqueline Nduwayezu, a Burundian at the Mahama refugee camp in Eastern Rwanda, said: 'We are here because there is no security in our country. It was not out of fun that we walked for miles and abandoned our homes and land. It is because the threat was real. People were being killed and are still being killed and dumped in mass graves and rivers.' <https://www.voanews.com/a/burundian-refugees-its-not-safe-go-home/4095461.html>

Twenty-three humanitarian organisations have criticised the Irish government for failing to meet its commitments on taking in refugees.

Just 1,600 people, out of a commitment of 4,000, will; be able to come to Ireland in 2017: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ireland-failing-to-uphold-its-commitments-on-refugees-cnqsr29ts>

The Shetland Islands Council has set aside £320,000 to buy two buildings, and extra money to employ a translator and a housing officer, in order to enable two Syrian families to move to the islands

The Shetland Islands are small islands off the Scottish coast: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-41833970>

There are nearly 1.4m refugees in Uganda, spread across the state's 12 districts. The UN is leading efforts to strengthen ties between each district, to help co-ordinate a national response: <http://www.ug.undp.org/content/uganda/en/home/presscenter/articles/2017/10/31/planning-for-all-integrating-refugees-in-district-development.html>

On 1 October, Anglophone Cameroonians, who say that they are victimised and oppressed by their Francophone compatriots (80 per cent of Cameroonians speak French as their first or main language) declared the independent state of Ambazonia.

Cameroon's government responded with force, and at least 30 people were killed (some estimates suggest the figure is closer to 100). In Nigeria, UNHCR reports that more than 2,000 English-speaking Cameroonians have fled into the neighbouring country. Nigeria is now gearing up to receive around 40,000 Cameroonian refugees.

Refugees International's advocate for sub-Saharan Africa and Peacekeeping, Alexandra Lamarche, says all sides must be pressed into peace talks, before matters escalate further: <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/blog/cameroonviolence>

4) Turkey – Greek-born deputy PM visits Greece; Kavala charged; inflation to increase;

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Hakan Cavusoglu, who was born in Greece, is in Greece for two days, and will meet Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras as part of his visit. He is in the country to prepare for the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan this month or early in December, to 'help improve neighbourly relations' and, he says, to meet his family members who still live here: <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/greece-born-turkish-minister-seeks-to-improve-relations/954877>

Turkish peace activist Osman Kavala, who was taken into custody on 18 October, has now been officially arrested by Turkish police. An Istanbul court has charged him with ‘attempting to abolish the constitutional order of Turkey, and Turkey’s government’.

Kavala has been an active member of humanitarian groups including some which work with French and German organisations, and with the Armenian government, which is in an ongoing dispute with the Turkish government for the latter’s refusal to accept Turkish guilt for the mass killing of 1.5m Armenian nationals in 1915 – an event which led to the first ever use of the term ‘genocide’.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/turkey-arrests-philanthropist-for-links-to-us-based-cleric/2017/11/01/199bed68-becf-11e7-9294-705f80164f6e_story.html?utm_term=.03de4770e4a5

Turkey’s central bank CBRT says that inflation in the state for 2017 will be 9.8 per cent (up from earlier forecasts of 8.7 per cent) and for 2018, seven per cent, up from 6.4 per cent. In September, the annual inflation rate was 11.2 per cent, more than double the central bank’s target rate.

A series of negative factors have impacted on the Turkish economy, most, though not all, the result of Turkish government activity at home and overseas.

The arrest of two US consulate employees in Turkey have caused US-Turkish trade to collapse, while Turkish arrests of EU citizens and repeated negative statements have seen the EU and Germany in particular, begin to reduce aid payments to Turkey, both reducing the state’s income, and causing traders to pull out of Turkish investments.

Simultaneously, the Iraqi Kurdish situation has significantly reduced oil flows into Turkey, and forced the state to look elsewhere for fuel: <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/turkey-hikes-2017-2018-inflation-forecasts-2017-11-01>

5) Qatar – employee rights welcomed, but must be stuck to;

Human rights organisations have welcomed Qatari agreement to abide by International Labour Organisation rules and workers’ rights to leave the country and change jobs without their employers’ permission, setting up a minimum wage, and establishing a fund to ensure payment of late wages, but fear that the state may not stick to the rules when international attention turns away from it.

The issues have been at the heart of criticisms of Qatar’s preparations for the World Cup finals, to be held there in 2022: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-qatar-labour/its-image-at-risk-abroad-qatar-backs-labor-reforms-at-home-idUSKBN1D21BU?il=0>

6) Syria – plant conservationist rescues seeds which ‘could save world’

A story about Ali Shehadeh, a Syrian plant conservationist. He and his organisation, Icarda, were forced to flee Aleppo when the Syrian civil war reached the city, but thanks to their work, the seed bank they have amassed – which includes several breeds of plants unique to the Fertile Crescent, and which he and Icarda believe may be hardy enough to grow even when other species of plants have died out, and so perhaps may save the human race – has been saved.

Though they do not know whether their original Aleppo bank, which contained 141,000 varieties of wheat, barley, lentils, fava and other food seeds, has survived, they are now working in Morocco and Lebanon. https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/climate/syria-seed-bank.html?_r=1&referrer=https://m.facebook.com/

7) Catalunya – Spain requests European arrest warrants for Puigdemont, others

The Spanish government has requested European arrest warrants be issued for former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont, as well as four former ministers in the Catalan Parliament, Meritxell Serret, (agriculture), Antoni Comín, (health), Lluís Puig (culture), and Clara Ponsatí (education) who all fled Catalunya with him, for Brussels.

All five failed to show up for the first day of a hearing at the Spanish High Court into whether they have committed acts of rebellion, sedition and misuse of public funds – all charges related to the calling and staging of an independence referendum for Catalunya and a subsequent declaration of independence from Spain, on the region's behalf.

Nine other members of the dissolved regional government did attend, and eight have been remanded in custody.

Puigdemont's lawyer told the court that 'the climate is not good' for his client to appear. While Spain's demand that the trial must be held seems an overreaction, it is perhaps worth noting that 'the climate is not good' is not an actual reason not to appear in court:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41840070>

Friday 3 November

1) Greece – Refugees. At least one dead off Dodecanese;

At least one person has died after a boat capsized between the Turkish coast and the islet of Kalolimnos, in the Dodecanese, early this morning.

The boat contained 22-24 people, of whom just 13 – eight men, four women and one child – have been rescued. The person confirmed as dead is reported to have been the mother of the ten year-old boy who has been rescued.

A boat and helicopter search is continuing, in an attempt to find and rescue any further survivors: <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/11/03/one-killed-many-missing-as-migrant-boat-sinks-in-eastern-aegean/>

2) Greece – society, politics, economics. ESM head says Greece may not get debt relief; 'Turkey, Greece, would benefit' from closer relations, 'but not Greece's fault'; Greece reopens air routes to Iraq; praise and guidance from IEA on Greece energy

Klaus Regling, the head of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) says it will be impossible to tell whether Greece needs 'further' debt relief until August 2018, when it is scheduled to leave the bail-out process.

In this, he disagrees with both the Greek government, and the IMF, who are agreed that Greece cannot be expected to maintain economic growth or even stasis, unless its debt is significantly reduced.

Disappointingly, Regling began by claiming that 'Greece has already received more debt relief in the last few years than any other state in the world'.

This is slightly disingenuous, because it chooses as its starting point the precise moment that Greece received debt relief, in 2012, rather than for example, 2000, or any year after 2012, in which case it would be untrue, because it fails to recognise that in fact other states have received greater debt relief as a percentage of their economy than Greece, but because the Greek economy (and its crisis) is larger than most states', the real cash amounts are higher, and because the 2012 'debt relief' was in fact a move to reduce debt held by private investors, rather than any debt held by the state itself.

It is also mildly irrelevant, given that the issue is not 'whether Greece has ever had debt relief' but whether a state with debt levels at 177 per cent of its annual GDP (Greece's situation) can possibly survive without assistance, or will require some form of debt relief to remain viable.

It is worth noting that the IMF favours debt relief not because it is a body which is charged with spreading largesse and kindness to nation states, but because it regards handing cash to Greece now as a waste of money if Greece is unable to survive without further massive bail-outs in the next 5-10 years, as it believes it will unless steps such as debt relief are taken now.

The EU's response is largely based on two imperatives – the Wolfgang Schaeuble-led attitude that Greece is 'to blame' for its debt, and must therefore be 'held accountable' for the results of it; and the EU-wide reluctance to take advice from the IMF, whose involvement in any states' affairs is regarded as an embarrassment by the EU, which is the richest political bloc ever to have existed on Earth.

Neither attitude, unfortunately, seems especially geared towards putting Greece's survival and/or ability to recover without yet more bail-outs, at the forefront of EU policy:

<https://money.usnews.com/investing/news/articles/2017-11-02/esm-chief-well-see-in-august-2018-if-greece-needs-more-debt-relief>

Greek newspaper Ekathimerini correctly says that Turkey would benefit if it and Greece could develop a relationship which was less fractious, not least because Greece is one of the strongest proponents of Turkey joining the EU.

It then, seemingly without irony, lists a series of reasons why Turkey is wrong, including its 'interventionist' policy on Cyprus (which Turkey did invade, but only after Greece moved to annex the island, and about which the UN Secretary General said peace and unification talks failed because both sides failed to engage properly).

Turkey – and perhaps especially its President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – certainly holds some unsavoury and unhelpful views, and acts on those. But the two states' problems boil down to the fact that both genuinely believe that they are right, and the other wrong.

Even that may in fact be true – or more true, on one side than the other – but the point is that you cannot improve relations with someone with whom you disagree by listing their beliefs as vices, and pretending you have none of your own:

<http://www.ekathimerini.com/222864/article/ekathimerini/comment/greece-turkey-and-long-term-interests>

Iraq and Greece have agreed to run ten passenger flights and two cargo flights per week, starting tomorrow (Saturday 4 November). All flights between Iraq and EU member states have been suspended since summer 2015, but earlier this week Saudi Arabia – which had not flown any kind of craft to Iraq since the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait – restarted its services, and Greece, along with Russia and other states, is now set to follow: <https://www.iraqinews.com/business-iraqi-dinar/greece-resume-flights-iraq-saturday-end-years-hiatus/>

The International Energy Agency has praised Greece for 'liberalising' (privatising) its energy and gas industries, and for improving the national infrastructure, but says it should do more to encourage energy production from renewable resources. At present, 12.5 per cent of Greece's energy produced comes from renewables.

Greece is the fourth-largest producer of coal in the EU, behind Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic, while most of the islands rely on diesel oil to generate electricity. They are scheduled to be connected to the national grid in 2023

IEA's executive director Fatih Birol said: 'In terms of renewables there is huge room to improve and the context of the interconnections with the islands is very important. To use diesel oil for generating electricity today is definitely not the best way.'

<http://www.ekathimerini.com/222894/article/ekathimerini/business/iea-praises-greece-on-energy-market-reforms-says-more-needs-to-be-done>

3) Refugees – Dubs scheme challenge fails; Germany 'lost track' of 30,000 people; Cameroon 'mistreating' Nigerian refugees; US (further) crackdown on refugees

Help Refugees has lost a High Court challenge in the UK to the government's cap on the Dubs Scheme.

The scheme, which was steered through Parliament by Lord Alf Dubs, who was one of the children saved from Nazi Germany before the Second World War by the illegal 'kindertransport' project, had been set to relocate 3,000 refugee children to the UK.

But the government limited the number to 480, which Help Refugees argued was done far too fast, without proper consultation with the local authorities the government has insisted must 'lead' the scheme, and that the Home Office had been deliberately slow to begin relocating children, in the hope that the situation would 'disappear on its own'.

The High Court ruled that none of the evidence presented at the case 'can show that the consultation process or the consideration of the results was unlawful.'

Lord Dubs commented: 'I am puzzled by the decision. I have spoken to heads of many local authorities who are ready to give more places for child refugees. We know there are about 200 child refugees in Calais, many of whom may be eligible for transfer to the UK. They are forced to live in bushes and woodland on the outskirts of the port, with no shelter, water, sanitation or regular access to food. The longer they wait the more depressing it gets for them, and the more likely they are to take matters into their own hands, and try to get on to lorries.'

The organisation says it will appeal the decision:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/02/child-refugee-legal-challenge-dubs-government-scheme-fails>

German newspaper Bild reports that Germany has 'lost track of' 30,000 refugees whose asylum claims were rejected by the state.

The newspaper has been running a 'campaign' to 'speed up' the deportation of failed asylum seekers. Which is helpful.

The German statistics office reports that at the end of 2016, there were 1.6m seeking asylum in Germany. In another world, this would be set alongside the earlier figure of 30,000 'missing' people to point out that this means Germany has allowed less than two per cent of applicants to 'disappear', but here, it is held up as a crisis of sorts.

We should note that it is far from clear how many of these applicants arrived in Germany in the last 12, 24 or 36 months, or how long their applications have taken so far.

And we should *also* note that this figure in fact includes every single person who has been *granted* asylum or ‘subsidiary protected’ status, including all 800,000 people who arrived in 2015.

We should, finally, note that the 1.6m is 16 per cent of Germany’s foreign population, meaning that significantly more than four in five of all non-German nationals in Germany are not refugees or aiming to be recognised as such.

Despite these nuances, the decidedly un-nuanced response of Alternative für Deutschland was: ‘Although the war in Syria is as good as over, the regional government does not mind the asylum authorities continuing to let Syrians stay here.’

To say that AfD has failed to understand the situation is to first take the gigantic leap necessary to believe it has any interest in the situation in the first place: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-asylum/pressure-mounts-on-merkel-over-migrant-policy-in-future-coalition-idUSKBN1D211A>

Human Rights Watch’s Refugee Rights Programme’s associate director Gerry Simpson calls for the international community to pay more attention to, and move to end, the abuse of Nigerian refugees, which has included attacks on around 100,000 people, and forcing tens of thousands of people back to Nigeria, where they have been attacked by Boko Haram:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/02/end-camerouns-abuses-refugees>

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions says that ‘hundreds’ of terrorism-related investigations are currently underway, into people who came to the US as refugees.

He does not note, however, that there have not been hundreds of terror attacks since 9/11, or that the heightened state of fear instilled in the US since the 9/11 terror attack means that the investigation – or more accurately ‘observation’ – of refugees from Muslim-majority states in the US has become standard, and is not indicative of a particularly high level of criminality, let alone terrorist inclination, among those refugees.

His comments came in the wake of Donald Trump’s decision to use Tuesday’s attack in New York, in which a man drove a truck down a cycle lane, killing eight people and injuring 30 more, to vow more ‘extreme vetting’ of refugees and immigrants to the US.

The man suspected of the killing is Sayfullo Saipov, who came from Uzbekistan, which is not a state Trump has so far called for a ban on entries from.

Sessions claimed: ‘(Trump’s) action to reduce the flow of refugees into this country will reduce the likelihood of potentially dangerous people getting here.’

Which is absolutely true. It will also prevent innocent people from escaping being murdered in their own home countries, and will significantly increase hatred for the US among people who had previously held the country in high or neutral esteem, and make it a little easier for terror organisations to recruit for a battle against ‘the West’.

Trump, meanwhile, has publicly-called for the death penalty to be used against Saipov. He has not yet done so for the man suspected of killing 58 people and injuring a further 546, in the 1 October shooting at Las Vegas: <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/jeff-sessions-justice-department-investigating-hundreds-of-refugees-for-terrorism-related-offenses/article/2639377>

4) Turkey – 39 more die in Turkish civil war; ‘283 IS members’ arrested; Syrians in Turkey want citizenship; bid for UNESCO board place; anti-government protest re-banned in Ankara; plans for ‘Turkey’s first home-made car’; journalists’ trial re-starts

The Turkish civil war between the government and the Kurdish minority continues, with 39 people killed in clashes in the south-west of the state yesterday. Those killed included eight soldiers and 31 people the Turkish government says were Kurdish fighters:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/turkey-13-killed-in-clashes-between-troops-kurdish-rebels/2017/11/02/76a9face-bfae-11e7-9294-705f80164f6e_story.html?utm_term=.78bd86179370

Turkish police have arrested 283 people they say they suspect of being IS members, in the last 11 days. The police crackdown across 25 states has also seen 66 improvised explosive devices seized. Those arrested include 96 Turkish citizens and 187 foreign nationals:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/turkey-detains-283-suspected-is-militants/2017/11/02/0bc76d2e-bfa2-11e7-9294-705f80164f6e_story.html?utm_term=.b2a34b234ae5

A Turkish study carried out by the Istanbul Policy Centre and the Human Development Foundation, in collaboration with UNHCR, has found that 75 per cent of Syrians currently in Turkey intend to apply for Turkish citizenship, and that 52 per cent intend to remain in Turkey

The study questioned 1,300 Syrian people, living in the ten Turkish cities (Istanbul, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Bursa, Izmir, Mardin, Hatay, Adana, Mersin and Kilis) which between them host 72 per cent of the 3.2m Syrian refugees living in Turkey.

It found that 650,000 Syrians in Turkey are in the workforce, roughly 31 percent of overall refugees. But as the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has already noted that just 10,000-15,000 Syrians have work permits, the vast majority of those in the labour market are unregistered.

Forty-nine per cent of Syrians asked agreed that they ‘see myself as part of this country’ a slightly higher number said they were finding it difficult to integrate socially. Forty-two per cent said they wanted to move to a European country if they had the opportunity:

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nearly-75-percent-of-syrian-migrants-in-turkey-want-citizenship-study-121785>

Turkey has applied to become a member of the board of UNESCO, the international educational, scientific and cultural promotion and protection body. It is competing against Finland, Germany and Portugal for one of three seats.

Turkey’s Education Minister Ismet Yilmaz said: ‘Turkey strongly believes in the mission of this organization to build peace in the minds of men and women.

‘To further support UNESCO’s efforts, we have decided to put our candidacy to its executive board for the period of 2017-2021.

‘Although we had not been a member of the executive board since 2005, we remained a very active member through our work in the relevant intergovernmental programs and important committees of UNESCO.

‘We have also financially supported the organization during a critical period and seconded experts.’

The US, which funds one-fifth (\$80m) of UNESCO's budget every year, pulled out of the body last month: <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/11/02/turkey-presents-bid-to-join-unescos-executive-board-1509643803>

The municipal government of Ankara has renewed a law banning all protest against the Turkish government. It includes public protest 'singing the national anthem in a disturbing way', public concerts, singing, sit-ins, hunger strikes, unauthorised gatherings in public spaces, and press conferences.

The law was introduced in September, in response to public outcry over the treatment of hunger-striking literature professor Nuriye Gulmen and primary school teacher Semih Ozakca, over their sacking by the government which accused them of being a part of the movement it claims inspired and ran the failed coup of 15 July 2016, and of being members of the Marxist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front, which both deny.

Ozakca was released last month, but Gulmen is still in custody, and has now been moved to hospital because of her deteriorating health.

Since March, her diet has consisted of water, sugar, salt, and vitamin B. She is next scheduled to appear in court on 17 November: <http://www.newsweek.com/you-cant-protest-government-turkey-new-ankara-policy-700333>

Anadolu Group, BMC, Kiraça Holding, Turkcell, and Zorlu Holding have joined forces to take part in a government-sponsored scheme to make Turkey's first 'indigenous' car.

The car is supposed to be completed in 2019, and ready for distribution and mass production by 2021.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he wanted to own the 'first such car' and said he would prefer it to be electric, or a hybrid.

It was tempting to add a question here about whether the car would be as successful as the Yugo, but as the Yugo was designed to attempt to pay off the 'debt' the US claimed it was owed by Yugoslavia after it bought the latter's non-functioning space programme, and there is nothing much wrong with building an electric car, we should probably wait until it is used as a 'signal of Turkish prowess' before being critical: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/five-companies-take-part-in-consortium-to-make-turkeys-first-indigeneus-car-121782>

The fourth hearing in the case against 17 Cumhuriyet journalists, who were arrested on 31 October 2016 on charges of terrorist activity, has taken place.

Prior to being returned to custody, Murat Subuncu, Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper, and one of those on trial, said: 'Do you know why we're standing here on trial? Because we, 17 people, never accept orders from anyone.'

Referring to the last hearing when the judge had compared the defendants to Icarus, he said: 'Even if we are destined to burn, we're determined to do what we know best – journalism.'

Burhan Sonmez, a board member of international literature and journalism rights group PEN, said: 'We are highly concerned about the rapid deterioration of the rule of law and the right to freedom of expression in Turkey. The absurd case against the Cumhuriyet journalists is unfortunately only one of many.'

The day's proceedings were slow and inconclusive, as both 'evidence' and witnesses requested by the prosecution – including a former Cumhuriyet reporter, who had been fired from the 'paper – failed to materialise.

Thirteen of the defendants were released on bail. Four, Murat Sabuncu, Ahmet Sik, Akin Atalay and Emre Iper, were once again remanded in custody, where they have been for more than a year: <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/turkey-newspaper-hearing-marred-by-procedural-violations-as-journalists-remain-behind-bars-a-year-after-arrest/>

5) Syria – Assad claims Deir ez-Zour 'taken', advances on next target, Iraq announces entry to 'last IS strong-hold'; Assad seizes four villages south of Aleppo; last doctor out of East Aleppo relives siege

The Syrian army has announced that it has taken the city of Deir Ez Zour, Eastern Syria, from IS. It was the last major strong-hold of the international terror group in Syria, after the SDF had liberated Raqqa on 17 October, and is the major city close to the main Syrian oil reserves.

The Syrian army, and its allies Hizbollah and the Iranian army, now plan to march on Albu Kamal, a large town held by IS, on the Western bank of the Euphrates. SDF forces are already harrying the city from the river's eastern bank, which is perhaps promising for a swift end to IS' presence as a rooted force in Syria (though of course the potential for a protracted desert campaign remains open if it can recruit and retain the fighters for it) but may be less positive for the immediate aftermath of a victory, should one result.

Iraq says its military has entered al-Qaim, the last major city strong-hold of IS in Iraq, though fighting continues in most areas of the city: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-deiralzor/syria-declares-victory-over-islamic-state-in-deir-al-zor-idUSKBN1D30IE>

The Syrian army has launched an offensive to the south of Aleppo, and has claimed victory in four villages on what it refers to as a 'vital strategic corridor' to the city. Hundreds of Syrian marines entered the region on Wednesday, and the Syrian national news service says their main opposition there is the militia Ha'yat Tahrir ash Sham, which was an al-Qaeda affiliate until al-Qaeda pulled out of Syria in 2016: <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/breaking-syrian-army-kicks-off-huge-offensive-south-aleppo-four-villages-liberated/>

A long read, but worth a look. An interview with the last doctor to be evacuated from East Aleppo, as Syrian forces advanced, and Russian and Syrian bombing continued:

<https://www.newstatesman.com/world/middle-east/2017/11/last-doctor-out-eastern-aleppo-you-can-t-just-turn-your-back-and-walk-away>

6) Iraqi Kurdish region – Iraqi forces on 'high alert' after talks 'break down'

Iraq's armed forces have been ordered to be on 'high alert' after representatives of the Iraqi-Kurdish region are said to have 'walked away' from talks with representatives of the Iraqi government.

The talks were centred on the remaining Peshmerga-held regions outside the original boundaries of the Iraqi-Kurdish region, but are likely to have faltered (if they truly have) on the issue of the ownership of the Iraqi border with Turkey and parts of Syria, which fall within the original regional border.

No fighting has broken out as yet, but Lt. Gen. Abdul Illah al-Atroushi, an officer from Iraqi army, said: 'Rapid Response forces, Federal Police, Counter-Terrorism Service and National Security have deployed in Zummar (one of the 'disputed' border locations).

'Federal troops received clear orders from the supreme military command to be ready for emergency that could occur over the coming few hours, especially if situations deteriorate as negotiations between Baghdad and Erbil came to an end.' <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraqi-troops-high-alert-negotiations-erbil-came-end/>