

Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Brussels, 21.10.24

Concerns regarding EU funded infrastructure and vehicles in Türkiye used for forced returns

Dear President von der Leyen,

We turn to you in this time of institutional change and re-organisation to raise serious concerns regarding EU funding and cooperation with third countries in the field of asylum and migration, leading to serious violations of core principles of international law, like the *ius cogens* principle of *non-refoulement*.

According to recent media reporting,¹ EU funded infrastructure in Türkiye is being used to detain, mistreat and push back asylum seekers and refugees to Syria and Afghanistan. Forced returns to Syria, a country with an ongoing civil war and known enforced disappearances of returnees by the regime² amount to *refoulement*. This, too, applies to returns to Afghanistan, a country with a dire humanitarian situation and a lack of human rights and fundamental freedoms under the Taliban rule³. According to the article, despite warnings from diplomats, civil society organisations, and even its own staff, the European Commission has kept a blind eye on these deportations, facilitated by EU funds.

The controversial 2016 EU-Turkey Statement⁴ did not lead to its intended result, as the country has not taken back migrants from Greece since 2020. As such, the context of the cooperation must change. While supporting the reception and integration of refugees in Türkiye is an aim to stand behind, the political reality has changed. Our taxpayers are funding ill-treatment and forced returns, which was neither the spirit nor the aim of the deal with Türkiye.

¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-eu-is-helping-turkey-forcibly-deport-migrants-to-syria-and-afghanistan/>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/syrian-returnees-subjected-gross-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-un>

³ <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/afghanistan-latest-euaa-guidance-confirms-going-protection-needs>

⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

With the new College of Commissioners setting up, we urge you to take the opportunity to shift the policy of the EU towards the implementation of our principles and values in external affairs by putting an end to funding human rights violations, like those happening to Syrians and Afghans in Türkiye. This partnership needs an overhaul and we expect you to spearhead this change urgently and efficiently.

Cooperation with countries of origin and transit is important, but it must remain within the framework of the principles the EU is founded upon, coupled with independent monitoring and frequent evaluation.

Thank you for taking up this issue and getting back to us.

Yours sincerely,

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