

International

SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2016

US hails Saudi move to wind down Yemen campaign

8

Cleric's supporters defy ban for Baghdad sit-in

9

EU urges countries to impose Russia sanctions over Crimea

10



BRUSSELS: Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (center left) shakes hands with European Council President Donald Tusk, center right, during a round table meeting at an EU summit in Brussels yesterday. —AP

EU, TURKEY STRIKE DEAL TO SEND BACK MIGRANTS ALL ILLEGAL MIGRANTS WHO REACH GREECE FROM TURKEY WILL BE RETURNED

BRUSSELS: The European Union and Turkey have reached a landmark deal to ease the migrant crisis and give Ankara concessions on better EU relations, The Czech prime minister announced yesterday. Near the end of a two-day summit, Bohuslav Sobotka tweeted: "The deal with Turkey approved. All illegal migrants who reach Greece from Turkey starting March 20 will be returned."

With the EU's 28 leaders on board, the document still needed to be officially signed off with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who had negotiated the final wording on the agreement since early yesterday.

Davutoglu said Ankara's prime concern was the fate of almost 3 million Syrian refugees on its territory. At the same time, he was looking for unprecedented concessions to bring the EU's eastern neighbor closer to the bloc.

For the EU, The deal would bring some closure to months of bitter infighting over how to deal with the migrant crisis, It would essentially see Europe outsource its refugee

emergency to Turkey. "For Turkey, the refugee issue is not an issue of bargaining, but values," Davutoglu told reporters earlier in the day, staking out the same moral ground that the EU has claimed throughout the crisis.

Davutoglu said he hoped that beyond helping the refugees, the deal would "deepen EU-Turkey relations" with the approval of unprecedented access to Europe for Turkish nationals and the speeding-up of bogged-down EU membership talks.

With more than 1 million migrants having arrived in Europe in a year, EU leaders were desperate to clinch a deal with Turkey and heal deep rifts within the 28-member bloc while relieving the pressure on Greece, which has borne the brunt of arrivals. The deal would have clear commitments that the rights of legitimate refugees would be respected and treated according to international and EU law. Within a week, Turkish and EU officials would assess joint projects to help Syrian refugees in Turkey, after complaints that promised aid of 3 billion euros

(\$3.3 billion) was too slow coming.

Turkey would also be guaranteed that EU accession talks on budgetary issues could start before the summer. In the Idomeni camp on the Greek-Macedonian border, Muhammad Hassan, a Syrian from the devastated city of Aleppo, was looking for relief from the talks in Brussels and wondered why a continent of 500 million people could not deal with the situation.

"Europe have only 1 million" migrants, Hassan said. "How come it's difficult?" he asked, comparing the EU to Lebanon, a nation of 5.9 million. "If a small country takes 3 million refugees and didn't talk, how about Europe? It's not difficult."

The conditions in Greece and the Idomeni camp were called intolerable by the Greek government on Friday. Interior minister Panagiotis Kouroumplis compared the crowded tent city to a Nazi concentration camp, blaming the suffering on some European countries' closed border policies.

During a visit to Idomeni yesterday, Kouroumplis said the situation was a result of

the "logic of closed borders" by countries that refused to accept refugees.

More than 46,000 people are trapped in Greece, after Austria and a series of Balkan countries stopped letting through refugees who reach Greece from Turkey and want to go to Europe's prosperous heartland. Greece wants refugees to move from Idomeni to organized shelters. The EU-Turkey plan would be operational despite concerns about Turkey's subpar asylum system and human rights abuses. Under it, the EU would pay to send new migrants arriving in Greece who don't qualify for asylum back to Turkey. For every Syrian returned, the EU would accept one Syrian refugee, for a target figure of 72,000 people to be distributed among European states.

Apart from easing visa restrictions, the EU will also offer Turkey - home to 2.7 million Syrian refugees - up to 6 billion euros (\$6.6 billion) in aid, and faster EU membership talks. Lorne Cook in Brussels, Frank Jordans in Berlin and Nicholas Paphitis in Athens, Greece, contributed to this report. —AP