

Erdogan Says Turkey Can't Stand Alone Against New Migration Wave

Turkey, which already hosts the largest refugee population in the world, is at a tipping point, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warning his country wouldn't be able to cope with another influx of people fleeing the conflict in neighboring Syria.

"In case of a new refugee wave, we can't withstand this alone anymore," Erdogan said in an address to government leaders from Europe and elsewhere who arrived in Istanbul to discuss the growing refugee problem on Wednesday.

Erdogan is pushing for a greater say in a global debate over migration as countries from the U.S. to Australia clamp down on arrivals. Turkey played a key role in stemming the tide of migrants from Syria four years ago at the height of the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. More than 3.6 million Syrians have found a home there since the war began in 2011, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans followed in their footsteps.

But with the war in Syria nearing its endgame, Turkey faces the prospect of more people fleeing across the border should an agreement collapse to prevent an assault by President Bashar al-Assad's forces and Russian airstrikes on the last rebel stronghold of Idlib.

An Endless Flood of Syrian Refugees Tests Turkey's Tolerance

"Keeping the refugees within our borders can't be seen as the only solution to the problem that originates from Syria," Erdogan said, referring to Turkey's agreement with the European Union to prevent the refugees from reaching Europe in return for financial aid. The EU has also signed a deal in March 2016 that allows it to send back asylum-seekers and migrants to Turkey.

Erdogan has said that Turkey already spent as much as \$35 billion on the housing, health care, food and education for the arrivals. An economic downturn in Turkey is also fanning anger at government policies ahead of local elections in

March.

Turkey is now massing its troops on the border as it loudly calls for the formation of a safe zone within Syria where it hopes to build new cities to house the displaced people. The U.S. and Russia have serious reservations against the plan

“The formula of a safe zone is the most practical way to ensure the return of Syrian refugees,” Erdogan said.

Source: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-20/erdogan-says-turkey-can-t-stand-alone-against-new-migration-wave>

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