

Turkish Humanitarian Approach to Syrian Refugees and Turkish Economy

Dr. Abdullah Altun

1-INTRODUCTION

Turkey has witnessed the enormous refugee movements from Syria. At the first days of these movements, very contrary to continuing western approach to the issue, Turkey has opened all borders to the Syrian refugees. Probably, many western countries didn't expect that Turkey would take such a decision. Their common expectations at that day might be Turkey's resistance against such a huge refugee movement.

It is obvious that hosting such a vast refugee population is extremely difficult and a big burden for the budget of the country. Moreover, open-border policy and trying to deal with such a big issue may be politically dangerous if a government cannot convince public satisfactorily. Turkey has succeeded in controlling the issue.

2- WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF TURKEY HADN'T OPENED THE DOORS TO THE SYRIAN REFUGEES?

In a very short period, a large refugee population moved to Syria's border with Turkey. Turkey had two options: open doors or close doors. Turkey chose to open the doors. This decision mainly reflects the Turkey's sensitivity to humanitarian issues based on the religious and cultural values. To accept and manage such a great refugee movement has been an important indicator of being a great country. Turkey has welcomed the refugees in a very organized way with its public institutions, organizations and NGOs by providing them accommodation and foods from the beginning. In the following period, Turkey has also focused on the health and education needs of refugees. Recently, the refugees have been benefiting from the public education and health facilities as the Turkish citizens. Moreover,

many projects for social adaptation of refugees have also been conducted. Still, related authorities have been trying to increase effectiveness and efficiencies in providing all these services.

Turkey has spent more than 40 billion US dollars for the Syrian refugees so far. In this process, many countries failed to keep their promises of support to share the burden with Turkey. Turkey's primary concern has been humanitarian, neither economic nor political. It is possible to say that such a noble intention of Turkey has resulted in important benefits. However, these benefits cannot be implicit at first. In paragraphs below, we will discuss these benefits through alternative scenarios.

3-WHAT IF TURKEY HAD NOT OPENED THE DOORS?

In fact, such a situation might be the expectations of someone trying to create a terror corridor through the southern border of Turkey. In such a case, there would have been an accumulation of a large population of refugees in the southern border of Turkey. They wouldn't have had enough accommodation, foods and health facilities. They would have been very vulnerable to terrorist groups' propaganda. Such a situation would have caused higher costs to Turkey and the region. However, Turkey's humanitarian attempts eliminated such a potential very costly threat. Even, recent great success of Turkey in Syria in terms of forming North Syria safe zone cannot be considered separately from the Turkish humane attitude towards the refugees from the earliest days.

The success of Turkey in dealing with such a gigantic issue displays the power of Turkish public overall. So far, there has been many efforts to tarnish Turkish image by damaging public perceptions of Turkey's institutional capacity, especially by the EU countries. Although they have continued and insisted on asserting that Turkey has a weak institutional capacity, they are probably aware of the fact that they cannot be able to solve the refugee issue by their available institutional capacities.

Lately, the world economy has become more fragile. According to some views, trade wars take the main blame. However, the global economic problems started much earlier and not just limited to the global financial system rather the slowdown in growth and productivity accounts of countries has become much clear. Trade wars could be approaches of some developed countries for seeking some ways of protecting themselves from possible global crisis. While such global problems have impacts on every country, some actors started to wage economic war against Turkey. From one point of view, Turkish labor policy towards the Syrian refugees and relevant regulations for Turkish companies in hiring Syrians enable both of them gain in this process.

The long-term impact of Syrian refugees on GDP growth of Turkey may be considerably positive in following years¹. However, resettlement of refugees is another important point. It seems that many issues related with Syria will be solved step by step. Turkey by using both soft power and hard power to solve the issue has a prominent role in this solution. Turkey will play important roles not only in resettlement process but also in economic reconstruction of Syria as a result of its humane approach and win-win strategy for the region. This seems more beneficial for both sides in the long term.

4-CONCLUSION

In short, just solving such a big issue having costly outcomes for Turkey will be a big gain for Turkey in terms of social, economic, etc... A stable region will result in more productive economic relations in the region. And it is very clear that Turkish humane approach to Syrian refugee issues and Turkish soft and hard power interventions into region are mainly responsible for accessing stability from instability.

¹ For a much detailed investigation of the long term impact of Syrian Refugees on Turkish Economy, See the FEMISE Report by Ramon MAHIA and Ali KOC, available at <http://www.femise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MEDBRIEF-20b.pdf> (Date of access: 01.11.2019)