Critical EU Summit to Tackle Refugee Crisis, Turkey Membership

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European leaders began arriving in Brussels Monday for a European Union-Turkey summit that is expected to focus on the refugee crisis in Europe and convincing Ankara to crack down on the flow of refugees on Aegean Sea route to Greece.

The Turkish prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, told reporters outside the European Council headquarters that his government hopes the summit will focus on refugees as well as his country's membership into the EU.

"I am sure these challenges will be solved through our cooperation and Turkey is ready to work with the EU," Davutoglu said. "Turkey is ready to be a member of the EU as well. Today I hope this summit will not just focus on irregular migration but also the Turkish accession process to the EU."

EU leaders hope to finalize a deal with Ankara for stemming the refugee flow by offering billions of dollars in aid, a visa-free deal for Turks and speeding up Turkey's membership to the EU.

Davutoglu indicated earlier that his country may be willing to accept people being returned to Turkey if they do not qualify for asylum in Europe, such as Moroccans and Pakistanis.

The EU is expected to declare the Balkans route into Europe officially closed, which is practically the case now as more than 20,000 refugees are stranded in Greece due to border controls by eastern European nations.

Turkey is home to more than 2.5 million refugees, most of them Syrians who have fled the five-year conflict in their country.

The EU has been accused of turning a blind eye to human rights abuses by Turkey as part of Ankara's major military operation in the mainly Kurdish southeast region as well as a harsh crackdown on critical media and journalists in recent months.

But the president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, said that the recent seizure of Turkey's largest newspaper by the Turkish government will be brought up to Davutoglu during the summit.

The summit has been slammed by campaigners such as Global Justice Now who have labelled the British and EU proposals to combat the crisis as "inhumane and backward-looking."

The organization says the summit, among other issues, risks paying billions of dollars to an increasingly brutal Turkish government to keep refugees out of Europe.

"Europe is trying to offload its international responsibilities onto other countries at this summit," said Nick Dearden the Director of Global Justice Now via a statement on Monday.

"Turkey is conducting a brutal war on its Kurdish population and cracking down on any form of dissent. It is unconscionable that we would give billions of pounds to this government to offload our responsibilities," he added.

Dearden also lambasted the militarization of the Mediterranean sea which he said will create "gated community for the richest part of the world."

☮**@KenRoth** 87% of EU sea arrivals are from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan. Wrong to suggest economic migrants
http://bit.ly/1TZO2Tc

Dearden's comments come shortly after British Prime Minister David Cameron confirmed that the U.K. will be sending a Royal Navy vessel to help NATO ships patrol the Aegean Sea.

The British landing ship, RFA Mounts Bay, and two border force cutters along with NATO's fleet will identify smugglers taking migrants to Greece.

"This migration crisis is the greatest challenge facing Europe today," Cameron said on ahead of the summit.

"Where we can help, we should. And we've got to break the model of the criminal smugglers and stop the desperate flow of people crammed into makeshift vessels from embarking on a fruitless and perilous journey."

The summit will kick off at 12:30 p.m. local time after which the leaders will conduct a press conference. Later, EC members will meet again at 3 p.m. local time and another press conference will follow that.