



Watch List 2017

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Watch List Updates complement International Crisis Group's annual Watch List, most recently published in February 2017. These early-warning publications identify major conflict situations in which prompt action, driven or supported by the European Union and its member states, would generate stronger prospects for peace. The Watch List Updates include situations identified in the annual Watch List and/or a new focus of concern.

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Undocumented Migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America

Flows of undocumented migrants from Central America, through Mexico and toward the U.S. have given rise to a humanitarian emergency, albeit one that at present is largely treated by Washington as a national security menace and a justification for tougher border control. Originally driven by economic hardship, this northbound migration owes its intensity and longevity to multiple causes that make controlling or reducing it extremely hard. Mass victimisation of vulnerable migrants in transit has become the norm and could well be aggravated by Washington's growing anti-immigration agenda. In this context, the European Union (EU) should adapt its current strategies in Central America to promote a more comprehensive approach to the protection of migrants.

Humanitarian impact

The flow of migrants from the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – to the U.S. has become as much a flight from life-endangering violence as a search for economic opportunity. Surveys of migrants and refugees carried out by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Mexico showed 39.2 per cent cite attacks or threats to themselves or their families, extortion or forced recruitment into gangs as the main reasons for their flight.

Once on their journey north, undocumented migrants must chart a perilous path between the dual threats of law enforcement and criminal groups. Crisis Group's 2016 report (*Easy Prey: Criminal Violence and Central American Migration*, 28 July 2016) describes how toughened law enforcement has diverted undocumented migration into more costly, circuitous and dangerous channels, where criminal gangs and corrupt officials benefit from policies that lead desperate people to pay increasing sums to avoid detention.

In the process, undocumented migrants are exposed to kidnappings, human trafficking, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, robbery and extortion. The most egregious cases include the 2010 and 2011 San Fernando massacres, in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas, in which 265 migrants, most of them Central American, were killed by the Zetas drug trafficking cartel. Stuck in a legal limbo, migrants are doubly victimised: fearful of authorities, they are highly unlikely to report the crimes they suffer or gain access to medical care should they need it.

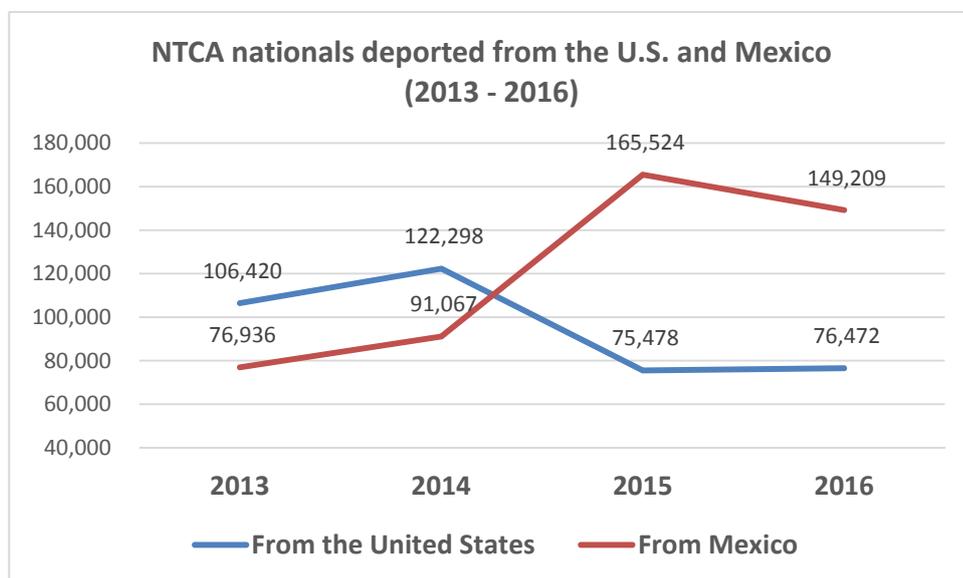
MSF has described undocumented migrants' plight as "comparable to the conditions in conflict zones". Two thirds of migrants reported being victims of violence during their transit toward the U.S.; nearly one third of women surveyed said they had been sexually abused during the journey. Among the migrants exposed to these risks are some of the most vulnerable groups in Central American society. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that asylum requests by unaccompanied NTCA minors in Mexico increased 416 per cent from 2013 to 2016.

U.S. policies

Fear of undocumented migration to the U.S. increasingly dominates political debate in that country. Although former President Obama stepped up border controls and continued a vigorous deportation policy – returning over five million people in total – his administration also welcomed legal migrants, acknowledged the humanitarian crisis posed by unaccompanied children arriving from Central America, and extended support to refugees around the world. President Trump, by contrast, was elected in part on a platform of clamping down on immigration, and some of his most influential supporters have made clear that their continued backing depends on implementation of stringent restrictive measures.

Undocumented entry into the U.S. already had become more difficult. 100,000 undocumented migrants made it into the U.S in 2016, compared to over 600,000 in 2006, according to a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) report.

Deepening Mexican collaboration with U.S. efforts to staunch the flow of Central Americans accounts for much of this reduction, and is likely to persist as Mexico strives to mitigate bilateral frictions with the Trump administration. In response to the 2014 crisis presented by migrant children arriving at the U.S. border, Mexican authorities boosted checkpoints, detentions and deportations of Northern Triangle nationals on its southern border with Guatemala. Mexico now deports more Central Americans than the U.S. (see graph).



Sources: Mexican Secretariat of Government http://politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/Boletines_Estadisticos and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) <https://www.ice.gov/statistics>

None of this has lessened the Trump administration’s determination to curb recent arrivals from Mexico and the Northern Triangle. The Temporary Protected Status (TPS) – which benefits some 200,000 migrants who came to the U.S. following hurricane Mitch in Honduras in 1998 and an earthquake in El Salvador in 2001 – is at risk of termination in 2018.

Likewise, on 5 September, President Trump rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, created by the Obama administration to defer deportation and provide work permits to 800,000 undocumented migrants

who entered the U.S. as minors. President Trump suggested that Congress should use the six-month wind-down period before the DACA work permits expire to create a legislative framework for the program. But, under pressure from some of the administration's staunchest supporters, the White House has made clear that it will only support such legislation if Congress also enacts tough new immigration measures. How the legislative process will play out is not yet clear.

Although overall deportations by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) are reported to have fallen slightly – they reached 211,068 as of 9 September 2017, three weeks before the end of the fiscal year, as compared to 240,255 in FY 2016 – arrests of undocumented migrants have risen by 43 per cent since Trump took office, as compared to the same period the year before. Most strikingly, the number of migrants without a criminal record being detained has increased threefold since 2016.

Mexican and Central American responses

An increase in deportations – driven by arrests of undocumented migrants and expiry of the TPS and DACA – would place further strains on troubled social conditions in the Northern Triangle. Although the region has relatively robust legal frameworks to protect refugees, with Mexico at the forefront of international refugee and migrant protection efforts, they frequently are unable to provide what they preach.

For instance, asylum in Mexico can be a prolonged process. Out of 8,788 requests, only 5,954 were resolved in 2016, 3,076 of which were granted. Asylum-seekers must file requests within 30 days of crossing the border, and are kept in detention if arrested before applying. Many give up because of the detention centers' cramped and insalubrious conditions, or because they have no right to work while their requests are being considered.

Overall, the NTCA countries are not adequately equipped to receive new deportees. El Salvador's preparations to receive them are almost entirely restricted to the monitoring of suspected gang activities. The National Assembly's security commission has agreed on measures to track returnees accused of being street-gang members: over 500 suspected gang members have been sent back so far in 2017 to El Salvador, where high rates of violent crime and reported cases of extrajudicial execution of gang members complicate prospects of a return to peaceful civilian life.

Capacities to provide legal counsel, shelter, social reintegration or even transportation for returnees across the Northern Triangle are scant. Proposed legislation in Guatemala to strengthen the state's readiness to protect migrants has stalled because of that country's political crisis. In Honduras, the number of departing refugees and arriving deportees is the highest in the NTCA, but its government is concentrating on the president's re-election campaign and on activating its own protocols against deported gang members.

Recommendations to the European Union and its member states

The more U.S. concerns about security and the economic effects of mass migration continue to drive a restrictive immigration policy, the more important it will be – from both a humanitarian and regional stability perspective – for the U.S. and its partners to help generate economic opportunities, better governance and broader social protection south of the U.S. border. That was the logic behind the “Alliance for Prosperity”, which the Obama administration established jointly with the NTCA governments and pursuant to which some \$1.3 billion have been allocated to Central America in the 2017 and 2018 federal budgets. Today, that logic is at risk. A June 2017 high-level summit in Miami on prosperity and security in the NTCA, heralded a far stronger emphasis on security issues at the expense of recognition of the humanitarian emergency related to undocumented migration.

While the European Union (EU)’s role is limited due to the U.S.’s overwhelming influence in the region, it nonetheless could strengthen humanitarian responses and press for a more informed, integral approach to the protection of migrants, especially women and children. Migration forms a significant part of the EU’s co-operation with Latin America. The 2015 EU-CELAC Action Plan as well as the 2014-2020 Multiannual Indicative Regional Programme for Latin America include migration management and the protection of migrant rights as action points. So far, the EU’s initiatives in this field have focused on Latin America as a whole. However, the evolving migration dynamics in the NTCA call for a more targeted response. The EU should adapt its priorities in Central America and promote migration policies that focus on the protection and integration of migrants.

The EU should support Mexican and Northern Triangle authorities in their efforts to strengthen oversight of security agencies and state institutions working on migrant issues. Technical assistance and capacity-building support for the under-resourced Central American consulates situated on the migrant route through Mexico would help ensure better protection for those in transit. The initiative Migration EU eXpertise (MIEUX), a peer-to-peer experts’ facility that supports partner countries to better manage migration through tailor-made assistance, can be a useful platform and starting point for the exchange of expertise and best practices.

The EU could also boost technical support to expand refugee processing of NTCA nationals in neighbouring countries (mainly Belize and Costa Rica), particularly minors, and ensure regional governments and NGOs provide adequate shelter to those awaiting decisions. Financial and logistical support to neighbouring countries such as Panama and Costa Rica, as well as to other Latin American countries that agree to take a share of refugees, would help cushion the impact of increasingly forbidding U.S. immigration policies.

All in all, the EU should continue to pursue an approach to Central America grounded in supporting community violence prevention, institutional reform and poverty alleviation. Perhaps most urgently, it should assist the three Northern Triangle countries in developing new programs to help them reintegrate deportees, including through initiatives to help them access health care, training, employment and psychosocial support when necessary.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): A Dangerous Stalemate

Political uncertainty and instability in the DRC are growing as the one-sided implementation of the 31 December 2016 (Saint Sylvester) agreement has deepened the gulf between a newly invigorated regime and a weakened opposition and civil society. The Electoral Commission (CENI) still has not published a new calendar for polls promised by the end of the year, although, speaking at the UN General Assembly on 23 September, President Joseph Kabila indicated it was imminent. Recent comments by the CENI president indicate that the elections would not be organised before 2019. In this context of political uncertainty, opposition and civil society are renewing efforts to bring people out onto the streets; whether they can do so is unclear, as is whether they could control any protests that do occur. The grave socio-economic crisis, harsh repression by security forces and lack of confidence in political elites make for a potentially explosive cocktail of resentment and frustration. Beyond urban centres, violence is escalating in many provinces, adding to concerns for regional stability.

An increasingly confident regime that lacks a clear strategy

Few, if any, of the 31 December agreement's signatories sincerely believed in the agreement's stipulation that elections would be held by the end of 2017. The government has since controlled implementation of that deal and interpreted its provisions to suit its agenda of delay. Meanwhile, domestic pressure to stick to the timeline has diminished, in particular following the February death of Etienne Tshisekedi, the charismatic opposition leader, and in March, after the Catholic Church withdrew from its direct mediation role.

For its part, Kabila's government has engaged in a two-pronged strategy: violent repression and closure of political space at home on the one hand, intensive regional diplomacy to defuse U.S. and European Union (EU) pressure on the other. The latter track appears to have been particularly successful. African and especially Southern African powers now largely accept the government's interpretation of the agreement (notably its unilateral choice of prime minister). While they have been more critical behind closed doors and acknowledge that the political manoeuvring and delay tactics increase the risk of violence, their public positioning has given the regime vital breathing space.

A weakened opposition focused on Kabila leaving power

Faced with the regime's hijacking of the 31 December agreement, opposition and civil society are trying to regain the initiative. In July, Felix Tshisekedi, president of the main opposition coalition, the Rassemblement, suggested a six-month transition if the vote were not held in December, but without Kabila (whose constitutional mandate expired in 2016) retaining the presidency. In August, representatives of civil society platforms (including the youth protest movements Lucha and

Filimbi as well as the “Debout Congolais” recently launched by Congolese businessman Sindika Dokolo) adopted a manifesto with a similar proposal. Moïse Katumbi, a prominent opponent in exile, added his name to this manifesto in September. It calls for non-violent actions to pressure the government, reminding the population of its duty, enshrined in Article 64, to defend the constitution against anyone seeking to exercise power by violating its provisions. It hopes such actions will force President Kabila out, with a national conference held afterwards to designate a transitional mechanism.

This approach has scant chance of success. The opposition, weakened by the exile and imprisonment of several of its leaders, is riven by distrust among its factions and lacks internal cohesion. Struggling to organise street demonstrations, or control them when they do take place, its leaders appear for now to be resting their hopes on greater international (particularly Western) engagement. But the opposition faces a paradox: international actors are unlikely to take a more robust position in the absence of a credible domestic dynamic.

Worrying security developments

Meanwhile, several provinces – including the Kasais, Tanganyika, North and South Kivu – are experiencing violent conflict, fuelled by both local tensions and the national political stalemate. Playing the role of *pompier-pyromane*, the government thus far has contained the fighting while people close to the regime have simultaneously stoked unrest and used it to justify election delays. But this dangerous strategy has increased tensions with several neighbours, notably Angola, which hosts thousands of refugees from the troubled Kasai region. As one of the world’s gravest humanitarian crises, with 3.8 million internally displaced and more than 600,000 refugees, humanitarian support remains under-funded despite some EU and member states contributions, and the recent additional amounts announced this year.

A recent small rebound in copper prices has allowed the government to promise better and more regular salaries as well as to ease currency depreciation pressures. But economic fundamentals remain poor. With families squeezed by rising prices and growing petty corruption, popular discontent is rising along with prospects for urban unrest.

International actors need to step up support for the 31 December agreement

The EU, UN, the African Union (AU), relevant sub-regional organisations and the Chinese, French, Russian and UK governments, together with the DRC government, met on 19 September on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. The chair’s summary of that meeting reaffirmed broad support for the Saint Sylvester agreement, despite the inevitability that its electoral timetable will now slip. This is welcome news insofar as the agreement’s core principle – the need to hold elections without amending the constitution – deserves strong support in the face of the regime’s attempts to kill it with a thousand cuts.

But international actors need to turn this support into concrete action that pressures the government and electoral commission to move forward with election preparations. While the EU should offer technical electoral support, as envisaged at the New York meeting, it should denounce attempts by the DRC government to further delay the polls (including through publishing unnecessarily long timetables). It also should condemn, of course, any attempt by Kabila to change the constitution's presidential two-term limit. International reaction to the soon-to-be-announced electoral calendar will be an initial test – if the timetable stretches too far into the future, as recent communications from the CENI indicate it may, the EU, in concert with other relevant international actors, should make this clear, stressing that elections could be held sooner and offering technical support to reach that goal while actively criticising delay tactics. Alongside this, EU and member states should continue work that supports Congolese civil society and internal voices calling for democracy and constitutionalism.

Effective pressure on President Kabila to move toward elections and stick to term limits requires better international cooperation. Western powers – notably the EU and its member states – should reach out to African leaders to hear their concerns and try to iron out differences. At present, African powers tend to acquiesce in Kabila's interpretation of the agreement and refrain from criticising (at least publicly) his efforts to remain in power, while the West has adopted a more critical stance. Disagreement thus far has revolved around how best to push Kinshasa toward elections. African leaders are hostile to Western sanctions on DRC leaders put in place over the last fifteen months. While those sanctions may have had some impact in 2016 in deterring violence and helping forge the December agreement, they increasingly have diminishing returns as Kabila's regime uses them to portray pressure on it as a form of Western imperialism. They ought not be reinforced while efforts are made to align international views.

Post-ISIS Iraq: A Gathering Storm

With the military defeat of the Islamic State (ISIS) drawing near, Iraq faces dramatic new challenges. On 16 October, Iraqi federal forces marched onto Kirkuk, helped by a deal with one of the Kurdish parties, and retook the city and Kirkuk's oil fields. The action was prompted by a referendum on Kurdish independence staged by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on 25 September within its territory and in areas disputed with Baghdad. The "yes" vote was overwhelming, and thus held out the threat of eventual secession. In its aftermath, the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi saw the need to reassert Iraqi sovereignty over the disputed territories, including Kirkuk, ahead of (still unscheduled) legislative elections next year. This is because of an intra-Shiite competition that has been unfolding in Baghdad, involving military and political factions with longstanding ties to Iran that were empowered by the fight against ISIS. The Kurdish-Arab standoff and the intra-Shiite rivalry intersect and reinforce each other.

The involvement of a plethora of armed groups in the fight against ISIS, alongside state agencies that respond to different chains of command, has created a hyper-militarised environment that further undermines Iraq's already weak legal framework. Political actors jockeying for power in the post-ISIS environment may be tempted to exploit this fragmentation and to expand their leverage by pushing toward further escalation. To prevent a collapse of Iraq's post-2003 political system, substantial reforms are required. The EU can play a key role in such an effort. While the anti-ISIS campaign operated primarily on the military level and was largely conducted in the framework of the U.S.-led coalition, the next steps involve areas where the EU has strong expertise and capacities, namely reconstruction and security sector reform.

A messy governing and security framework

Despite its military achievements, the anti-ISIS campaign has had the unintended effect of arming and training security forces that operate outside formal institutions in both Iraq and the Kurdistan region. Western countries' largely unconditional military support and lack of a common and clear political roadmap for the post-ISIS period have not helped. The control that various militarised groups exercise over parts of the country challenges Baghdad's authority and sovereignty. Without conditionality, reconstruction aid to ravaged areas may be hijacked by the militias that control them, further entrenching their rule, with adverse effects for the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and governance.

Baghdad-Erbil: From standstill to standoff to violence

The Kurdish independence referendum raised the Kurds' expectations of statehood while severely damaging relations between Erbil and Baghdad. It led Baghdad to shift from a lukewarm-cooperative to an openly confrontational approach as a way to show resolve in defending Iraq's territorial integrity. Abadi felt he could move to regain control of the disputed territories because he realised he had the

support of both Iran and Turkey (an ally of the KRG until the referendum), as well as the U.S. All three were angered by Barzani's rejection of their repeated requests that he agree to delay the referendum. The challenge now will be to return to political talks about the future of the disputed territories; settling the internal-boundary question will be critical to bringing long-term stability to these troubled areas.

A blocked political system

Political tensions and institutional weakness will remain endemic as long as Iraq fails to reduce corruption and refresh a leadership that has ruled since 2003. To shore up declining popular support, leaders engage in confrontational rhetoric and strategies, exacerbating ethnic and sectarian tension and inviting external interference. This stands as the largest obstacle to addressing outstanding issues, such as the conflict between Erbil and Baghdad, the Sunnis' crisis of representation, and the broken trust in Iraq's legal framework, institutions and formal politics. In particular among young Iraqis, this adds to the urge to either join armed groups or leave the country altogether. (See Crisis Group MENA Report N°169, *Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's "Generation 2000"*, 8 August 2016)

An EU role in reshaping the post-ISIS period

At its June 2017 Foreign Affairs Council the EU reiterated its commitment to support Iraq during the post-ISIS period. Beyond responding to the immediate humanitarian crisis, the EU should seek to tailor this support in ways that help address the underlying causes of the current political malaise, notably the corruption and dysfunction of the Baghdad government, the corruption and succession quarrel within the Kurdistan regional government, the crisis of Sunni representation, and the Baghdad-Erbil standoff. Through its upcoming EU Strategy for engagement with Iraq and subsequent action, the EU should pursue:

Humanitarian and reconstruction aid as part of a political strategy EU assistance should be guided by the overarching political goal to transform a militia-dominated environment into more effective governance by state institutions. To this end, aid and reconstruction should aim to break local communities' security and financial dependence on the various militia leaderships that emerged from the anti-ISIS campaign. Local governance institutions linked to and funded by the central state or the Kurdistan regional government should be partners of first choice. Strengthening those institutions may also make it possible to integrate local armed factions (of Sunnis as well as minority groups) into the local police and other security forces, thus breaking Shiite militias' monopoly over security, which has fuelled resentment and could reignite support for jihadists who are currently lying low. In the disputed territories, EU reconstruction assistance could be conditioned upon acceptance by both Erbil and Baghdad of a renewed UN-led process (see below) to resolve the questions of these territories' status and the sharing of revenues generated from the oil extracted there. The way forward should include a return to a shared security mechanism between Erbil's peshmerga ministry and Baghdad's defence ministry in the most sensitive areas.

Reorganisation of the security sector In the post-ISIS phase, the EU should assist Iraq and the Kurdistan region in integrating chains of command and bringing the range of formal and informal armed groups under the purview of the Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish peshmerga ministry. Through its new Advisory Mission for security sector reform (EUAM), the EU can contribute its member states' extensive experience in this field to enhance efforts by other international actors (NATO, UNDP) to help the federal government and Kurdistan Regional Government reorganise their respective security forces. In particular, the duties and purview of various security bodies (Counter-terrorism Forces, Iraqi Army, National Police, Kurdish peshmerga forces and Kurdish Asayesh security police), as well as the status of new outfits such as the Shiite militias, need to be defined.

Leadership regeneration Post-ISIS stabilisation also hinges on a renewal of the political leadership in Baghdad and Erbil by committing both capitals to free, fair and timely elections. Thanks to its established network in civil society organisations, the EU can encourage the participation of new political actors by engaging in leadership training for members of informal, non-violent protest movements, who have challenged the political elite in the recent past, and identify new youth-led civil society groups and volunteer organisations – even if they have emerged under the umbrella of, or enjoy ties to, the Shiite militias – and facilitate their integration into local governance institutions and established political parties.

Iraq's Territorial Integrity The EU should use its diplomatic and economic weight to help revive negotiations between Baghdad and Erbil over the Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) question. Settling the endemic instability in these areas is crucial to both sides regardless of the ultimate disposition of Kurdistan. Talks should be led by the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) based on its important but still unused 2009 study and proposals on that subject. To this end it should work to refocus UNAMI's mandate (through a Security Council resolution). This is also an issue that Turkey, a support of the earlier UNAMI effort, has found of great interest and would almost certainly wish to engage Erbil on.

Rohingya Crisis: A Major Threat to Myanmar Transition and Regional Stability

Since Crisis Group's warning in its February Watch List, Rakhine state's "alarming trajectory" has deteriorated further. The views of most people in Myanmar and those of much of the international community on the crisis are diametrically opposed. Domestically, the situation is seen to stem from terrorist attacks and a legitimate security response to them; internationally, the focus is on the disproportionate military response to those attacks involving serious abuses characterised as possible crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Myanmar's political direction in relation to the crisis has now been set and is very unlikely to be altered. Views domestically and internationally are hardening in different directions, with huge implications for domestic politics and Myanmar's standing in the world.

At the open session of the UN Security Council on 28 September, there was consensus among many members on four points: (1) ending the military operation and vigilante attacks on Rohingya; (2) giving unfettered humanitarian access to northern Rakhine state to UN agencies and their INGO partners; (3) ensuring a safe, voluntary and sustainable return of refugees from Bangladesh to their original places of origin in Myanmar; and (4) addressing the underlying problems through implementation as soon as possible of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission, in particular the need to expedite the citizenship verification process and to ensure that those granted citizenship are able to enjoy associated rights.

Failure to address the immediate humanitarian crisis in Rakhine state – through concerted efforts to end attacks and protect civilians as well as urgent humanitarian assistance to Rohingya communities still in Myanmar who are already on the move – has aggravated the crisis and triggered the departure of tens of thousands more Rohingya to Bangladesh, who have been arriving in recent days. Only the UN has the capacity to quickly deliver assistance at the required scale, and in a way that will reassure the international community that needs of all communities are being met. The main reason for this second wave of departures must also be clear: it is not a lack of food or humanitarian assistance per se, but rather restrictions and insecurity that deprive people of their normal means of survival, whether farming, fishing, foraging or trading.

Likewise, failure to make significant progress on voluntary refugee returns under UN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) auspices, and begin to address the root causes of the crisis through implementation of the Annan commission recommendations, will leave a huge population in Bangladesh of some 700,000 people who have fled over the last year. This group of traumatised people with no hope for the future could easily be taken advantage of by militants and transnational jihadist groups for their own ends, which could create deep instability in Myanmar and the wider region. Some may attempt to cross the Andaman Sea by boat to Malaysia once the monsoon recedes in the next month or so, facilitated by people-smuggling networks, risking a repeat of the maritime migration crisis of 2015.

Myanmar's actions are already aggravating the terrorist threat. On 3 September, a senior leader of al-Qaeda in Yemen called for attacks on Myanmar and its

leaders in response to the treatment of the Rohingya. On 13 September, al-Qaeda appealed to its members to support the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) militancy and warned that Myanmar would face “punishment” for its “crimes”. Although ARSA issued a statement the following day stating that it had no links with “any transnational terrorist group” and “did not welcome the involvement of such groups in the conflict”, the risk of other groups manipulating the situation is significant, as is the possibility of terrorist attacks elsewhere in Myanmar from outside the country, whether directed or inspired by transnational jihadist groups. Tellingly in this regard, an Egyptian militant group named Hasm claimed responsibility for a blast at the Myanmar embassy in Cairo on 30 September.

Furthermore, the crisis represents a grave threat to Myanmar’s transition. It has unleashed a wave of strong nationalist sentiment and greatly amplified and reinforced bigoted views. There is extremely strong support in the country for Suu Kyi’s position and the military’s approach. The risk is that once such narrow nationalist sentiments take hold, unopposed by the democratically-elected government, they will constrain future government responses to the crisis and set the country once again on a path to international pariah status. This will make it much more difficult for Myanmar to forge an inclusive national identity, essential for such an ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse country. And it would hinder progress on the peace process, whose success requires national consensus on granting greater political authority and economic resources to minority communities and areas. Anti-Western sentiment, currently running high, also could be entrenched.

Suu Kyi does not have the authority under the constitution to order the military to take a different approach, but through the president has the power to convene military leaders. However, her most powerful tool is her undisputed position as the person in the country enjoying the greatest political and moral authority. This gives her the power to sway public opinion, and considerable ability to influence the security forces; her speech to the nation on 12 October contained some positive signals in this regard. Efforts to shift the domestic narrative may come at a cost to both her political support and relations with the military. However, the risk of the military attempting to take complete power, or launch a coup, is very low; the military spent more than twenty years preparing the current constitutional arrangement and putting it in place, and from their perspective the transition has been much more successful than they might have expected. They would see a return to military rule as a failure of their generational project, to be avoided at all costs.

Recommendations for the EU and its member states

Immediate priorities remain those articulated by a number of members in the 28 September Security Council briefing: ending state and vigilante violence and village destruction; unfettered humanitarian access for the UN and INGOs; ensuring voluntary return of refugees to places of origin in line with international law; and timely implementation of the Annan commission’s recommendations. To work toward these priorities, and in light of the 16 October EU’s Foreign Affairs Council conclusions, the EU and its member states should:

- ❑ Continue to support strong Security Council scrutiny and action.
- ❑ Continue to support strong, principled multilateral and bilateral engagement with Myanmar's civilian and military leaders in order to chart a way out of the crisis.
- ❑ Support efforts to ensure accountability for rights violations in northern Rakhine state.
- ❑ Encourage Suu Kyi to speak to the nation and make full use of her position to shift the national narrative in a more constructive direction.

A return to previous forms of bilateral and EU sanctions on Myanmar in the form of travel bans and asset freezes may not be helpful in achieving concrete progress, and risks constraining future policy options as well as sending unintended signals to investors that could impact on the economy, to the detriment of ordinary Myanmar people.

Turkey's Growing Refugee Challenge – Rising Social Tensions

Recent events have brought tensions between the European Union (EU) and Turkey to a head. Ankara is embittered over the stalled accession process and what it perceives as the EU's inadequate support for Turkey's fight against terrorism. The EU and its member states voice heightened criticism of Turkey's human rights track record, increasingly unaccountable institutions and lack of respect for the rule of law; President Erdoğan's pre-referendum rhetoric caused particular harm to relations with Germany and the Netherlands. In the absence of substantive accession talks, the March 2016 refugee deal now represents the main venue for dialogue and the most significant strategic thread holding the two sides together. Although Ankara complains that EU's €3 billion pledge to support Turkey's response to the refugee influx has been conditional and that only €883 million so far has been disbursed, and while EU representatives find the Turkish bureaucracy ill-prepared for developing projects, both sides value continued cooperation in this area.

At first glance, Turkey has handled the refugee influx remarkably smoothly. The backlash caused by Turkey's absorption of some 3.2 million Syrians, who arrived incrementally since 2011, has been far less serious than anticipated and refugee flows to the EU have substantially diminished. But the Syrian refugee issue in Turkey is far from being settled. In particular, social resentment and hostility toward Syrians has risen, notably in suburban districts of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, which have high refugee concentrations.

Violence affecting refugees and asylum seekers – which, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees grew markedly in 2017 – is most prevalent in neighbourhoods offering cheap housing and low-skilled jobs: these have drawn large numbers of Syrian refugees, in turn raising housing costs and depriving host communities of job opportunities. Risks of violent outbursts are further exacerbated where ethnic differences overlap with economic tensions. This is the case in particular of Kurdish host communities, some of whose members already feel politically marginalised, resent that public institutions such as hospitals and municipalities offer Arabic translation services and are angry that the central authorities are seeking to accommodate Syrian parents' desire for Arabic language courses in schools even as their own longstanding demands regarding the Kurdish language remain unaddressed. They also find their low-skilled informal sector jobs threatened by the influx of Syrian refugees. (The informal economy, where competition between host and refugee communities tends to take place, constitutes on average 34 per cent of the economy according to Turkish and World Bank statistics).

More broadly, interaction between refugees and host communities remains extremely limited, especially among women. Syrians and Turkish citizens living in large urban areas are particularly prone to misunderstanding and conflict, lacking the affinity that tends to exist in border provinces. Turkey's generosity toward Syrians – for example providing them with free health care and easier access to university entrance – at times gives rise to beliefs that are strongly held but inaccurate, such as that Syrians can enter university without taking an examination, or that

monthly aid channelled to Syrians in need is covered by citizen taxes; these in turn inevitably fuel resentment and anger.

Ankara also faces enormous problems in seeking to integrate roughly 1 million school-aged Syrian children into its already strained education system. The challenge is not only to ensure Syrian children can enrol but also to cope with host communities' anger at the overburdening of the local school system. (According to a recent report by Education Reform Initiative, around 77,000 additional classrooms, and 70,000 new teachers are required to meet the needs of local and Syrian refugee communities). This situation is all the more serious following the government's decision to both phase out the temporary education centres (TECs) which essentially provided a parallel Arabic-language school system for Syrians and to shut down NGO-run schools for Syrians. Integrating Syrian children into Turkish public schools is the correct policy approach in the long run, but for now it generates tensions given insufficient infrastructure and teacher capacity. Funded by the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the World Bank, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Development Bank (KfW) in particular have been working closely with Turkish authorities to build new schools and train teachers to support the transition away from the temporary education centres, but implementation has been lagging. Some schools place Syrian children into separate classrooms, thereby defeating the purpose of integrating Syrians into Turkish public schools.

As 2019 local and presidential elections loom, and with the Syrian presence increasingly unpopular, opposition parties might well resort to an exclusionary discourse, calling on the state to send refugees back home. Such a political dynamic inevitably would further exacerbate tensions and fuel instability. Because the government often faults the EU for the presence of Syrians in such large number and for not doing enough to ease Turkey's burden, rising tensions between Syrians and host communities also potentially could harm broader Turkey-EU relations. This in turn would call into question the value of the refugee deal. Both Turkish authorities and the EU should take steps to minimise this risk.

For Turkey, a key is to adopt an inclusive approach, paying special attention to those segments of society most affected by the presence of Syrian refugees. The EU and its member states also have an important role to play in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugees. In planning further disbursements and considering possible additional allocations through the EU's Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis or Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, they should:

- ❑ Develop a roadmap for gradually shifting from humanitarian aid to local-level development, especially geared at strengthening already-existing public service capacities. The focus should be on encouraging Syrians to achieve sustainable livelihoods, although any effort along these lines should not come at the expense of humanitarian assistance, particularly to vulnerable groups.
- ❑ Continue to support expanding vocational training opportunities to enable both Syrian refugees and host communities to acquire skills that match labour market needs and to foster greater social cohesion, particularly in big city neighbourhoods that have been rife with tension.

- ❑ Expand opportunities for Syrians to learn Turkish as a foreign language. Some 70 per cent of Syrians in the country are believed not to speak Turkish; the resulting lack of interaction with host communities provides fertile ground for negative sentiments to grow.
- ❑ As part of the ongoing effort to integrate Syrian school-aged children into Turkish public schools, support the employment of Syrians currently teaching at TECs as “intercultural mediators” in public schools to help refugee children who have trouble keeping up and fitting in.
- ❑ Continue to channel resources toward bolstering school infrastructure and teaching capacities. This is key to facilitate the transition away from TECs while addressing related host community grievances.
- ❑ Work with Turkish authorities to more effectively dispel myths about how EU funding is channelled and convey that resources and aid are not exclusively channelled to Syrians.
- ❑ Consider offering support for service provision in languages other than Turkish in municipalities and public institutions that service large groups of residents with a different mother tongue. For example, this policy could be applied to localities where the number of such residents exceeds a certain percentage. This is a highly sensitive issue in Turkey, but could be addressed practically, for instance by employing a sufficient number of translators.
- ❑ Ensure that field-based, EU-funded NGOs and their community centres focus on ways to encourage positive interaction between Syrian and host community groups of diverse backgrounds.

Tensions, already high, could rise further still, especially if Syrian refugees’ return prospects do not rise. With Turkish citizens’ youth unemployment having reached 20 per cent, and with relatively low economic growth rates predicted for next year, social pressures are likely to increase and, with them, the risk of inter-communal confrontation. Moreover, as Syrians learn Turkish, develop more settled communities and grow more acutely aware of their relative lack of opportunity, they could become increasingly frustrated and alienated; more may also fall prey to criminal networks. That approximately 40 per cent of school-aged Syrians currently are not enrolled in school and that up to 30 per cent of Syrian adults in Turkey are illiterate raises the spectre of the emergence of a parallel society facing long-term marginalisation.