



Turkey:

Turkey bans Russian warships from crossing the Black Sea

NATO member Turkey changed its rhetoric to describe Russia's attack on Ukraine as a "war" on Sunday and vowed to implement parts of an international pact that would potentially restrict the transit of Russian warships from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.



Kyiv had appealed to Ankara to prevent more Russian ships from entering the Black Sea, from where Moscow launched

an attack on Ukraine's southern coast. At least six Russian warships and one submarine transited the Turkish Straits this month.

"It's not a few airstrikes now, the situation in Ukraine is officially a war... We will implement the Montreux Convention," Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey's foreign minister, said in an interview.

The rhetorical change allows Turkey to enact the articles of the 1936 Montreux Convention, which allows it to restrict ship transit of its Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits during war or when threatened.

However, Cavusoglu reiterated that Turkey cannot prevent all Russian warships from entering the Black Sea due to a clause in the pact barring those returning to their registered base.

"This exemption should not be abused. Ships declaring that they will return to their

bases and pass through the straits should not be drawn into the war," Cavusoglu said.

Press freedom in Turkey - journalist shot dead

A journalist has been shot dead in north-west Turkey. Gungor Arslan, editor-in-chief of the local newspaper "Ses Kocaeli", was hit by bullets in front of his newspaper's editorial building in Kocaeli, local media reported. He died in hospital shortly thereafter. According to the police, they arrested a suspect.

According to Erol Onderoglu, representative of the organization Reporters Without Borders in Turkey, Arslan had researched corruption in Kocaeli. In the two most recent editions of Ses Kocaeli, Arslan made allegations against the mayor, who belongs to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's conservative AKP party. Accordingly, the mayor is said to have given public contracts to groups close to the AKP.

Arslan had been physically attacked in the past. Many people considered him "brave" because of his research on corruption, Onderoglu said. Turkey is ranked 153rd out of 180 in the Reporters Without Borders index of the state of press freedom in the world.

Alarming xenophobic trend in Turkey

Amid reports of attacks on Syrian refugees in Turkey, the trend toward violence and the safety of foreigners has become a concern in the country that once welcomed refugees with open arms.

The country's economic woes, with high unemployment rates and declining purchasing power due to inflation, have led many to blame foreigners.



The frequent use of anti-refugee rhetoric by politicians

has fanned the flames of racism. A Turkish court recently scrapped controversial plans by the mayor of the northwestern city of Bolu, Tanju Ozcan, to increase water bills for foreigners tenfold and charge 100,000 lira (€ 7,800) for civil marriages by foreigners in Turkey.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has hardened, exacerbated by an influx of Afghans after the Taliban took over their country in August 2021.

Nail Al-Naif, a 19-year-old Syrian refugee, was killed by a group of men in Istanbul while he was sleeping in his room. Eight people were arrested.

Another young Syrian man was stabbed to death in a park in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir just days after a mob attacked a shopping center frequented by Syrians in Istanbul, allegedly after a Syrian refugee refused to give a Turkish man a cigarette.

In November, three young Syrian workers were burned to death in the western city of Izmir after a fire broke out in their home while they slept.

Police arrested a Turkish man who admitted to having started the fire motivated by xenophobia.

Germany:

Solidarity in deportations

During a visit to Austria, German Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser emphasized closeness with the conservative-led government in Vienna and spoke out in favor of the consistent repatriation of migrants without a right to stay.



Faeser took part in the opening of a conference in Vienna aimed at facilitating the deportation of migrants stranded in Balkan countries with no prospect of asylum. According to the Austrian Minister of the Interior, representatives from around 20 countries and the European Commission took part. The focus was on Bosnia-Herzegovina, where several thousand migrants are suspected. Austria's Minister Karner said the aim was "to enable those who have no chance of asylum to be repatriated as soon as possible". The affected Balkan countries want to be supported, "also in know-how and in organizing charter flights".

With the support of the EU, it should be made easier, among other things, to issue return documents. At the conference, the needs of the Western Balkan countries are to be recorded and regional return mechanisms are to be set up and activities pooled. It's not about adding an additional level of bureaucracy, Karner assured, but, on the contrary, about pragmatic and concrete help. Another focus is the fight against smugglers and the improvement of EU external border protection.

In Vienna, after the resignation of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, the governing

party ÖVP declared that it would stick to a restrictive migration line even under Chancellor Karl Nehammer. Interior Minister Karner defended the erection of border fences. He also insisted that Austria "currently" did not want to take in any more refugees, especially from Afghanistan, because the country was already under a disproportionately high burden. On the other hand, he did not rule out that Austria could participate in a future, possibly regional, distribution mechanism.

Nancy Faeser, on the other hand, emphasized the similarities, "also in migration policy". It is important to comply with human rights obligations, "to reduce irregular migration and, where possible, to enable regular migration". A common European approach is necessary. "Germany and Austria advocate effective border protection and consistent repatriation of migrants who have no right to stay, especially those who are at risk," said Faeser. She did not want to comment on any differences, for example in the assessment of deportations of minors, citing courtesy.

Austria:

Islamic Milli Görüs community opens up to criticism

At a panel discussion in Vienna last Saturday, the Islamic Federation (IF) and the Islamic Community Milli Görüs (IGMG) faced critics for the first time, who accused them of anti-Semitism and Islamism of their Turkish mastermind Erbakan, who died eleven years ago.

The reason for the event was a report, attesting that the IF and IGMG were close to the Milli Görüs movement founded by Erbakan and its Islamist Saadet party. IF chairman Tasdögen saw this as an example of the "exclusion" allegedly being pursued

by the federal government and denied any connection to the Turkish organizations.

For example, IF representatives showed solidarity with an Austrian convicted of membership in a terrorist organization in 2019, who had run for the IF in elections by the Islamic Religious Community (IGGÖ).

In the meantime, however, Milli Görüs presents itself as an organization in transition, although it is disputed whether this is honest or merely tactical.

"We're trying to do the balancing act of taking what's good about Erbakan and discussing much more what we see as problematic today," said a spokesman.



MENA Research Center is about to publish a separate article on the event. A topic-related podcast is also being prepared.

European Union:

EU wants to take in unlimited Ukraine refugees

All war refugees from Ukraine will be taken in, the EU promises. The EU has made it clear that people from Africa and the Middle East who live in Ukraine and are registered there will also be able to enter the country.

"It's war in Europe for the first time and that's leading to a different way of thinking in the member states," said German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser at a meeting with her colleagues in Brussels. She sees a "total paradigm shift". All refugees from Ukraine

are welcome, promised EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. "Everyone who has to flee from Putin's bombs will be welcomed with open arms."



The EU Commissioner for Home Affairs and Migration, Ylva Johansson, made it clear in Brussels that the border is also open to people from third countries who live in Ukraine and want to travel to their home countries. "They have to be helped. In addition, those in need of protection can also apply for asylum in the EU."