

EU, Turkey sign deal to stem migrant flows

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Brussels: The European Union (EU) late on Sunday clinched an agreement with Turkey, offering \$3.18 billion in aid and more promising access for Ankara's membership to the bloc to trade for massive reduction of illegal migrant arrivals.

European Council President Donald Tusk made the announcement at a press conference after Sunday's summit, which was attended by leaders of the 28-country bloc and visiting Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Xinhua news agency reported.

Brussels has been negotiating with Ankara since September on strengthening the country's border controls with Greece in a bid to stem the unexpected migrant or refugee influx as the continent is experiencing the most severe migrant crisis since the aftermath of the Second World War.

Some 1.5 million illegal migrants have arrived the EU so far this year, according to Tusk. He vowed a joint effort from Turkey, where some 2.2 million Syrian refugees are living, to stem the irregular refugee flows.

Turkey's neighbouring country Greece has since been a gateway for 700,000 more asylum seekers, also mainly from war-torn Syria, according to International Organisation for Migration.

Under the action plan the two sides agreed, the EU will offer 3 billion euros to Ankara to help improve the living conditions of millions of asylum seekers in Turkey.

"Three billion euros are given to Syrian refugees, not given to Turkey," said Davutoglu.

The EU also agreed to speed up work on Ankara's membership bid to the 28-nation bloc and loosen restriction on Turkish visa-free access to the EU.

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