

Press release

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EUTCC comment on the European Council's final conclusions 11 December – on Turkey

The European Council imposed limited sanctions on Turkey in relation to its resumption of oil and gas drilling in EU member states' territorial waters. In a press release from last Friday, December 11, the European leaders condemn Turkey's provocative activities and escalated rhetoric against the European Union, its member states and European leaders.

Though on a collision course for several years already, Turkey's president Erdogan had further escalated his rhetoric against several EU member states over the last few months. He boasted about Turkey's military power to change the map with Greece and Cyprus and said the French President Emmanuel Macron needed mental health treatment.

It is expected that in the coming weeks the EU sanctions regime against Turkey will include additional individuals and companies from Turkey's energy sector involved in oil and gas drilling in Greek and Cypriot territorial waters. In a first response, Turkey's ruling party's spokesman Ömer Çelik wrote on Twitter that the European Council's decisions are biased and unlawful.

Though at first sight the conclusions of the European Council's meeting suggest the EU leader showed their muscles, the same leaders reaffirmed in the same conclusions their political determination and financial commitment to continue the so-called refugee deal with Turkey. Referred to as financial assistance to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey, the refugee deal gave Erdogan access to much needed EU billions to soothe discontent with his mismanagement of Turkey's economy. Moreover, the continuation of the deal emboldens the Turkish president in using Syrian refugees as a bargaining chip to blackmail the EU. The EUTCC strongly emphasize that Erdogan's expansionist strategy itself is causing refugees.

Yet that *not being said* could well *be* the most *important* part of the conclusions of the European Council. Turkey's further regression into a 'zero rule of law'¹ presidential system, its hostage holding of politicians, among them the co-chairs, members of parliament and mayors of the pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party HDP, the full-fledged assault on civil society and independent media remain unmentioned. The European Council is also silent about Turkey's unlawful occupation and war crimes in Afrin and parts of Jazire in Northern Syria and the ongoing attacks against the Syrian Democratic Forces SDF, and its military interventions in Northern Iraq - all part of Turkey's destructive military approach to the Kurdish issue. The recruitment of Jihadi fighters in Syria to fight proxy wars in Libya and more recently Nagorno Karabagh also go unmentioned.

The European Council's silence about all such issues a flagrant contradiction to the democratic values and the rule of law on which the council says the EU is grounded and encourages Erdogan to continue his destructive path chosen.

On behalf of the EUTCC board

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**EU Turkey
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