
BORISSOV APOLOGISES TO MOGHERINI FOR 'ULTIMATUM' OVER AFGHAN MIGRANTS

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On a surprise visit to Brussels yesterday (5 October), Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said he had apologised for an ultimatum he gave last week □ that he would withdraw Bulgarian troops from Afghanistan if he cannot deport Afghan refugees back home.

Borissov has repeatedly complained of a lack of solidarity in the EU over the refugee crisis.

Until recently, most refugees entering Bulgaria from Turkey would not pause, seeking to continue their journeys towards western Europe. But now they are finding themselves stranded in the EU's poorest country.

Under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission led by NATO, Bulgaria had several hundred troops in Afghanistan, which peaked at 602 in 2011 and currently numbers 80 people under the Resolute Support Mission.

On 2 October Borissov said his cabinet may reconsider the presence of Bulgarian peace-keepers in Afghanistan, if the country continues to be flooded by Afghan migrants.

Speaking to the press yesterday (5 October) after meeting with EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini, Borissov said he had apologised for his ultimatum. He, however, expressed satisfaction that this pressure had contributed to speeding up the signature of a readmission agreement.

EU-Afghan deal

On 3 October, the EU sealed a deal with the Afghan government to speed up the deportation of Afghan citizens who do not qualify for asylum in the bloc. The deal has not been made public, but the Guardian newspaper reports having seen a copy, according to which it would allow the deportation of an unlimited number of asylum seekers from member states to Afghanistan.

Under the plan, the EU will bear the costs of returning the migrants, including travel expenses and re-integration programs, while Kabul has promised to readmit citizens and supply travel documents for migrants without papers within a month.

The EU said special cases, such as single women, unaccompanied minors, the old and the sick can only be deported if they have families to return to and their safety can be guaranteed.

Speaking alongside Borissov, Mogherini said the readmission, coupled with generous international

aid, could be a win-win agreement. The readmission and aid are not officially linked together.

Borissov made additional comments to the Bulgarian national radio. Asked if the Bulgarian troops will remain in Afghanistan, he said:

Under these conditions, they will remain. You heard what Ms Mogherini said. I apologised for the peremptory way in which I expressed myself, there was no point in keeping a contingent in Afghanistan if there is no readmission agreement.

The prime minister said that people leaving close to refugee centres in Bulgaria were disturbed by the behaviour of Afghan refugees.

They are between 20 and 30 years old. All young. They have bad look in their eyes. They behave in a way which is not acceptable. In the centres, there are constantly fights. They create problems, Borissov said.

The press regularly reports of intolerance of the Bulgarian population vis-a-vis the refugees.

Borissov expressed hope that the readmission agreement would soon be ratified, so returns could become possible.

If this agreement works, it would be possible to establish similar agreements with other risk countries, he said.

The Bulgarian prime minister, who has returned to his country, will be hosting today (6 October) the inauguration of a beefed up EU border guard system, at the border with Turkey, in the presence of migration commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos and representatives of the Slovak presidency of the EU.

Photo: EurActiv

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