
AUSTRIA TO REQUEST EXEMPTION FROM EU MIGRANT RELOCATION SYSTEM

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Austria will seek an exemption from having to accept more asylum-seekers under an EU relocation system, it said today (28 March), arguing that it has already taken in its fair share during Europe's migration crisis.

The move is a new blow to a relocation system that would cover only a fraction of migrant arrivals to the European Union and which has barely been implemented because of opposition led by Eastern European countries including Poland and Hungary.

Refugee relocations very far from target, Commission admits

Member states have relocated only a small fraction of the 160,000 asylum-seekers they committed to absorbing from Greece and Italy, the Commission admitted today (2 February).

It coincides with a tightening of security and immigration rules by the centrist coalition in Austria, where a wave of arrivals that began in 2015 helped fuel a rise in support for the far-right Freedom Party that still leads in opinion polls.

We believe an exception is necessary for Austria for having already fulfilled its obligation. We will discuss that with the European Commission, Chancellor Christian Kern told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting. We will send a letter as quickly as possible and then begin discussions.

Fewer than 14,500 asylum-seekers have been relocated from Greece and Italy, the first EU countries that many refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa set foot in, under the two-year EU plan that was supposed to cover 160,000 people and which expires in September.

Austria took in roughly 90,000 asylum seekers in 2015, more than 1% of its population. More than a million migrants arrived in Germany that year, most of them having passed through Austria after crossing the Balkans.

We are of the opinion * that the people in question here already sought an asylum application or arrived in Italy or Greece, Kern said. We must check whether we have already fulfilled our quota and discharged our obligation.

Austria and Balkan states prepare for collapse of EU-Turkey deal

Austria said on Monday (7 November) it will meet with its Balkan neighbours to discuss what

action they might take if a deal with Turkey aimed at restricting the flow of illegal migrants into the European Union collapses.

Austria has already acted separately from the EU for more than a year, seeking to stop the refugee flows by strengthening the borders along the so-called Balkan route.

The country feels vulnerable in case of collapse of the EU-Turkey deal to stop migrants from crossing into the Greek Aegean islands.

Kaynak/Source: