

# Crisis Escalates at Turkey-Greece Border

Thousands of refugees are trying to enter the European Union after Turkey declared it would no longer stop them.



Refugees and migrants wait before they attempt to enter Greece from Turkey on March 2 in Edirne, Turkey. BURAK KARA/GETTY IMAGES

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Here is today's *Foreign Policy* brief: **Thousands of refugees** seek to leave Turkey after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan opens the border, **Benjamin Netanyahu** claims victory in Israel's election based on early results, and updates on the global spread of the **coronavirus**.

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## Crisis Grows as Refugees Head for Greek Border

Since Turkey said last week it would no longer stop refugees from crossing into Europe, more than 10,000 migrants—including many from Syria and Afghanistan—have arrived at its land borders with EU countries and at least 1,000 have landed on Greece's eastern Aegean islands. Greek authorities have responded with tear gas and a halt to asylum requests. The rush to the border is already fueling a crisis. A child died when a boat capsized on Monday, and Turkish security sources have reported at least one Syrian migrant was killed at the land border.

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, is expected to visit the Greek-Turkish border today. She has expressed sympathy with Turkey's "difficult situation"—hosting more than 3 million refugees—but condemned its move to let them leave its territory for Europe. German Chancellor Angela Merkel criticized Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan directly, calling the decision "unacceptable."

But Erdogan doubled down on Monday. "The period of single-sided sacrifice has come to an end," he said. "The number of people who are headed toward Europe since the moment we opened our borders has reached hundreds of thousands. This figure will soon reach millions." (These figures do not correspond to eyewitness accounts and appear to be vastly inflated.)

**Can Greece stop accepting asylum seekers?** Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced Sunday that Greece would stop taking new asylum requests for a month. The U.N. refugee agency said Monday that it has no right to do so under international or EU law, even as the EU rushes to help Greece police its border.

**Driving displacement.** Meanwhile, the Syrian government offensive that has displaced at least 1 million people continues in the country's northwest. The fighting has escalated in recent days, and President Bashar al-Assad's troops reentered a strategic town on Monday. Turkey, which supports some rebel groups, has said it will keep up drone strikes against the Syrian army.

Turkey's decision to allow migrants to cross into Europe was intended to get EU leaders to come to its aid against Assad—but so far it isn't working, Tessa Fox reports for FP from the Turkey-Greece border.

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## What We're Following Today

**Netanyahu declares victory, hasn't won yet.** With 90 percent of the votes counted, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds a narrow lead in Israel's parliamentary elections, but appears just short of a majority as the final results trickle in. Netanyahu declared victory on Monday night based on exit polls that showed his party was ahead of rival Benny Gantz's Blue and White party and only one or two seats away from a governing majority.

Despite Netanyahu's Likud party winning 36 seats—while Gantz's party took 32, according to preliminary results—the Likud-led right-wing bloc still appears to have won only 59 seats in Israel's Knesset, two seats short of the 61 needed for a majority.

That means more deadlock is possible after what could be a third inconclusive election in less than a year. Still, Netanyahu has a solid chance of forming the next government, Joshua Mitnick reports for FP. A victory would be a major boost for the prime minister, who is set to face a corruption trial on March 17.

**Millions vote in U.S. Democratic primaries.** Today, 14 U.S. states hold presidential primaries with the potential to greatly shape the race, with around one-third of total delegates up for grabs. Heading into Super Tuesday, the Democratic field has already changed dramatically. Three candidates have withdrawn since Saturday, including Sen. Amy Klobuchar and former Mayor Pete Buttigieg—both of whom dropped out and endorsed former Vice President Joe Biden. The exits in part suggest a push to boost the moderate Biden over frontrunner Sen. Bernie Sanders. But they could benefit the other candidates, especially Sen. Elizabeth Warren and former Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

*Check out our coverage of foreign policy in the 2020 election [here](#).*

**WHO warns of stigma as coronavirus spreads.** The coronavirus is now spreading almost nine times as quickly outside of China as inside, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that stigma is “the most dangerous enemy.” On Monday, a WHO technical team and a shipment of medical supplies arrived in Iran, where 66 people have been reported dead from the virus, including a senior government official. South Korea, meanwhile, has recorded

4,335 cases—the most outside China—and announced it would launch a murder investigation into the leaders of the church at the center of the outbreak in the city of Daegu.

Global markets were calm on Monday, on hopes that governments would take action to soften the blow to the economy. The European Union is mulling fiscal policy options to be decided later this month.

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## Keep an Eye On

**AMLO's approval ratings.** Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is suffering in opinion polls, as respondents say that violence in the country is on the rise—particularly against women. López Obrador's support had remained steady since he took office in December 2018, but two new polls show that his approval rating has fallen—a sign that he's feeling the effects of a record number of homicides and a struggling economy.

**Barrier to Afghan peace talks.** After signing an agreement with the United States on Saturday, the Taliban is refusing to take part in peace talks with the Afghan government unless it releases 5,000 Taliban prisoners. The demand, rejected by President Ashraf Ghani, presents a significant barrier to the peace process proposed by the U.S.-Taliban agreement. The Taliban also announced that a seven-day reduction of violence had formally ended.

**India's communal violence.** Indian lawmakers have clashed over the religious riots that killed at least 45 people—mostly Muslims—in Delhi last week. Conducted with some complicity on the part of the police, the violence bears the hallmarks of an organized pogrom—and could be repeated in other parts of the country, Brown University professor Ashutosh Varshney tells FP's Ravi Agrawal.

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## Odds and Ends

**Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi** said Monday that he was considering

deleting his social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. He didn't provide a reason, but removing himself from social media could distance the prime minister from some hot-button issues, such as the protests against his government's controversial citizenship law. Still, Modi is one of the most popular world leaders on Twitter: He has 58 million followers.

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That's it for today.

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*Photo: Burak Kara/Getty Images*

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