

FIVE BULLETS ON EUROPEAN COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

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The European Council conclusions yesterday include five points worth mentioning:

- The Council has endorsed the main lines of a cooperation agreement to stem the migrants' flow under negotiation with Turkey, notably including substantial financial assistance (three billion euro), a roadmap for visa liberalization of Turkish nationals coming to the EU, and the commitment to reopen five chapters of accession negotiations; indeed, Turkish premier Erdogan is exacting a high political price for his help.
- Under the section "Strengthening the protection of EU external borders," the Council wants to "enhance the mandate of Frontex (the EU border surveillance agency) ... over the development of a European Border and Coast Guard System, including the deployment of Rapid Border Intervention Teams"; it looks like the French proposal on this is making headway.
- The mandate of Frontex will also be expanded to include assistance in the management of "hotspots" for the identification and registration of arriving migrants and the organization of joint return operations. In order to be viable, the open door policy will have to include more and more repatriations of those who don't qualify for asylum; the Council is stepping up pressure on member states to deliver on this score.
- A bungled paragraph on Syria and Libya reaffirms that Assad bears the greatest responsibility for the humanitarian disaster in Syria, at the same time recognizing that there is now a need to focus on the fight against Daesh (or Isis), while deprecating the Russian initiative to step up its military operations in Syria. What all this will amount to, exactly, remains unclear.
- And, finally, under "Other Items," the Council "took stock" of the discussions on the Presidents' Report on completing Europe's EMU, stating that the process must be taken forward "in full respect of the single market and in an open and transparent manner." From what I can gather, it is a signal to the UK that their concerns are being heard, and a message to the EU that, for the time being, any further progress on EMU is on hold.