To the kind attention of:

Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President of the EU Commission, in charge of Better Regulation, Inter-Institutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights

Federica Mogherini
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission

Elżbieta Bieńkowska
European Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

Johannes Hahn
Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations
c.c.:

Mr Filippo Grandi
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Mr William Lacy Swing
Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Nils Muižnieks
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Bruxelles, 14 November 2016

Dear
Vice-President Timmermans,
Vice-President Mogherini,
Commissioner Bieńkowska,
Commissioner Hahn,

According to Turkey's National Disaster and Emergency management Authority (AFAD), in the last three years almost three million Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey.
Most Syrians are staying close to the Syrian-Turkish border, in the Turkish provinces of Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, where, up until 2014, 25 refugee camps for Syrians were built. However, the majority of them lives outside of camps (where around 89% of the refugees in Turkey are located): they dwell in particular in the cities of Istanbul and Gaziantep, where neither aid nor support is supposed to be available for them. This situation has led thousands of Syrians to live in extreme poverty, leading to a massive emergence of child labour in the areas they inhabit.

Only 15 % of all Syrian children go to school, according to several reporters, and Syrian children are no longer accepted by public schools, where their number has become larger than that of Turkish children. Furthermore, there are not enough Turkish teachers speaking Arabic and only a limited number of Syrian volunteers try to cover this gap, but have not been trained to work as teachers.
At this time the language barrier remains an important obstacle, and there is no system in place through which Syrian children receive special help to learn Turkish in public schools.

Related to the issue of schooling is the fact that child labour is reportedly widespread among the Syrian community living in Turkey. This should be regarded as a result of - as well as a cause for - Syrian children not attending school. In addition, poverty among the refugees and a lack of meaningful employment opportunities cause parents to rely on children as contributors to the family income. Due to their high level of vulnerability, more refugee children in urban areas may be subject to a range of abuse including child labour.
In Turkey, the textile district consists of 52'000 factories employing 918 thousand workers that contribute to 7% of the national GDP. Europe is the world's second most important importer of textile products from Turkey and many big businesses/conglomerates have relocated their activities to Turkey. As stated by the Business & human rights resource centre - a no profit organization - 28 international brands (such as H&M, Next, Primark, C&A, Adidas, Burberry, Nike, Puma etc.) produce their clothes in Turkey, where labour is cheaper.

According to several sources, NGOs , newspaper reporters , TV reportage , thousands of refugee children between 8 and 13 years old work in the factories of Gaziantep and many other Turkish town next to the border. They work for eight-nine hours per day, with a daily salary of 5 Turkish liras (about 1, 5€).
Considering that, on average, an adult worker gains 30 Turkish liras per day, the factory owners prefer to employ young children.
Children work in painful conditions, in very close contact with a wide range of toxic chemicals and other hazardous substances such as hydrochloric acid. Their bodies show marks of exploitation and severe physical maltreatment: their hands are damaged by hydrochloric acid and their skin assumes the colour of the dresses they produce because of the toxic colouring material handled every day. Dozens of "blue children" drift around in the streets of Gaziantep.

In the light of the above :
Knowing that Turkey has been unable to offer access to school to Syrian refugee children, and to guarantee to Syrian families more dignified standards of living, schooling and working conditions, we believe that the Turkish government cannot protect the rights and the interests of refugees and, more specifically, of refugee children.

We therefore ask for the cessation of readmissions and returns of migrants to Turkey, especially of vulnerable categories such as children.

Furthermore, the European Parliament has adopted on 25 October 2016 a motion for resolution on corporate liability for serious rights abuses in third countries, presented by Mr. Ignazio Corrao, which calls on the Commission and Member States to guarantee policy coherence of business activities with human rights at all levels: within different EU institutions, between the institutions, between the EU and its Member States, in particular in relation to the Union's trade policy.

We call therefore:
- on the Commission and Member States to explicitly include the aforementioned principle of coherence in all treaties signed by them, keeping by this way with international commitments on the respect of human rights. We note that this will require intensive cooperation between different directorates-general, within the Commission and the European External Action Service;

- on all States, and in particular EU Member States, to prioritise for immediate action the establishment of mandatory human rights due diligence for business enterprises which are owned or controlled by the State, and/or receive substantial support and services from State agencies or European institutions as well as for businesses that provide goods or services through public procurement contracts;

- we recall the different but complementary roles of States and private companies with regard to human rights protection; we recall that States, acting within their jurisdiction, have a duty to protect human rights, including against abuses committed by companies, even if they operate in third countries; we strongly recall that, where human rights abuses occur, the States must grant access for the victims to an effective remedy; we recall in this context that respect for human rights by third countries, including guaranteeing effective remedy for people under their jurisdiction, should constitute an essential element of EU's external relations with these countries.

Looking forward to Your kind reply

Kind regards,

Barbara Spinelli – *GUE/NGL Group*

Ignazio Corrao - *EFDD Group-M5S*

Bart Staes – *Greens/EFA Group*

Stefan Eck – *GUE/NGL Group*

Patrick Le Hyaric – *GUE/NGL Group*

Takis Hadjigeorgiou – *GUE/NGL Group*

Paloma López Bermejo – *GUE/NGL Group*

Eleonora Forenza – *GUE/NGL Group*

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