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Turkish police resort to lobbing tear gas across Greek frontier, as border security ‘holds’; mass cancellation of trips to Turkey



More violence erupted at a border post on the Greek-Turkish frontier on Friday morning, as television footage showed Turkish border guards and police, no less, firing tear gas and smoke canisters into the Greek side of the Kastanies border post. Reporters at the scene referred to an attempt to create a smoke screen so that Turkish authorities could transport third country migrants, who had gathered on the Turkish side of the border in a bid to illegally enter Greek and EU territory.

The incidents come less than 24 hours after the presidents of Russia and Turkey on Thursday evening announced a deal to halt fighting in the northwest Syrian province of Idlib, ostensibly de-escalating a conflict that had pushed the two countries to the brink of open warfare.

The agreement includes a cease-fire that came into force at midnight in Idlib, the last stronghold of Syrian insurgents and jihadi terrorists. By extension, there was guarded optimism in Greece and the rest of Europe that Turkish President Tayyip Recep Erdogan will back down from efforts to funnel hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants towards Europe – under the claim that they are displaced Syrians from Idlib.

Nevertheless, the unprecedented actions by the Turkish state over the past week, which Greece has dubbed as an “asymmetrical war” and a “weaponization” of migrants, has generated a wave of cancellations of trips to neighboring Turkey by local clubs and organizations throughout Greece, a development linked to both the attempted breach of Greek borders and concerns over the corona virus.

Several clubs whose members have ancestral roots in western Asia Minor had planned to travel to the port city of Izmir, for centuries known as Smyrna, on Sunday, March 8, in order to commemorate the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Other groups of holiday-makers were planning pilgrimages to the Haghia Sophia Cathedral.

According to the head of an association of northern Greece tour and travel agencies cancellations to Turkey reach 50 percent.