

EU summit strengthens brutal refugee policy

By Martin Kreikenbaum
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European heads of state agreed to a further intensification of a brutal refugee policy at this week's EU summit meeting in Brussels. While no agreement could be reached on the mandatory relocation of refugees, other proposals were unanimously adopted. Deportations are to be more effectively organized and special camps created in which asylum proceedings would be fast-tracked under the supervision of EU authorities.

It was no accident that the refugee question was placed alongside that of Greek austerity mandates as the focus of the EU summit. The entirely inhumane character of the European Union is revealed in both regards. Internally, the confederation of states becomes more and more like a prison, in which poverty, exploitation and oppression grow rapidly and only the rich and powerful profit from the "unity" of Europe. Outwardly, it resembles an impenetrable fortress, at whose walls thousands of refugees lose their lives.

While there were serious conflicts with the Syriza government in Greece concerning austerity mandates, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras agreed to the cold-blooded measures against refugees without any noteworthy objections. In doing so, he places himself unmistakably on the side of the EU and provides a cover for its sinister actions.

The joint decisions are a fundamental attack on the basic rights of refugees. The draft document, leaked by Statewatch before the meeting, states, "In the frontline states—meaning Italy, Greece and Malta—structured border zones and facilities will be constructed in which the assistance of experts from other EU states, the European Asylum Support Office, the border protection agency Frontex and the European Police Office will ensure the quick registration, identification and fingerprinting of refugees."

While the EU decisions are ostensibly intended to strengthen the Dublin Agreement, according to which

asylum applications are to be processed in the country in which the refugee first arrived, they are in reality a massive expansion of the powers of European asylum and security authorities and a further marginalization of refugees.

The draft of a new EU directive on fingerprinting also expressly provides for the use of force and the detention of refugees, including children and pregnant women. Additionally, the border protection agency Frontex is to be entrusted with future deportations.

The heads of states and governments have also ordered the EU Commission to produce a list, binding on all EU states, of arbitrarily determined "safe countries of origin" based on the German model. Refugees are to be identified and registered in camps run by European authorities, termed in the document as "Hotspots." From there, all those determined to come from the previously defined "safe countries of origin" will be immediately sent back.

Because no national authority will ultimately be involved during the entire procedure, refugees have virtually no possibility of appealing their deportation or even retaining legal help with their asylum application.

Should no immediate deportation be possible, refugees will then be detained for up to 18 months. In special "emergencies," when the number of refugees rises, even these restrictive regulations will be eliminated. That means that refugees do not have to be housed in specially built detention centers, but can also be relocated to regular prisons.

The nullification of international refugee protections and denial of the fundamental democratic rights of defenseless and desperate people bring into sharp focus the ruthlessness of the ruling class, which will not hesitate to employ the same methods against internal political opposition.

The second focus of the EU discussions concerned a "more effective" and rapid organization of

deportations. At the beginning of the month, European Commissioner for Migration Dimitris Aramopoulos complained in a letter to the interior ministers of the EU states that “the EU’s system for repatriating illegal immigrants is not fast or effective enough.” He added, “The effectiveness of the system must be improved. I am open to considering all options.”

In addition to greater involvement of Frontex, the EU summit document provides for further measures to essentially blackmail countries of origin and transit outside the EU into taking back refugees.

According to the principle of “more for more”, the payment of development aid and collaboration with African states will not only be coupled with cooperation with the EU on the refugee question, but will explicitly serve “the regional development of capabilities for strengthening border control, asylum, action against smuggling and reintegration.”

The questions of border security and the deportation of refugees were taken up without significant debate. The issue of allocation and responsibility for refugees, however, proved to be a significant bone of contention between the EU states.

A mandatory quota system, by which 40,000 refugees from Greece and Italy are to be relocated throughout the EU states, was already on the table. But according to information from *Spiegel Online*, when some heads of government, in particular Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, refused to accept several hundred refugees voluntarily, it sparked a heated war of words.

The heads of government accused each other of a lack of solidarity and touted national measures against immigrants. Meanwhile, the situation in Italy and Greece, where hundreds of refugees arrive daily, grows more and more precarious. With no help available, refugees in Italy have set up camp in train stations and under bridges.

In Greece, on whose islands more than 50,000 refugees have already landed this year, the refugee relief organization “Refugee Support Program Aegean” (RSPA) is sounding the alarm. Refugees can no longer find functioning reception facilities and must go without shelter. Many are imprisoned by the Greek police.

According to RSPA, refugees who are arrested are

detained for days in barracks, cage-like constructs or under the open sky. In Athens, long lines form every day in front of the asylum office. Those who do not manage to submit an asylum application there can be arrested again and detained as “illegal immigrants.”

The EU refuses to provide any emergency aid to the Greek authorities. While Frontex director Fabrice Leggeri explained in May of this year that he was concerned “about the situation in Greece and would therefore expand our activity and our assistance to Greek authorities,” this ultimately meant assistance with border security. Frontex tripled the presence of shoreline patrol boats in the Aegean Sea. In agreeing to the EU’s decisions, Syriza has given these policies their blessing.

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