

German and French leaders meet in Berlin summit on refugee crisis

By Alex Lantier
25 August 2015

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande met yesterday in Berlin for a summit on the refugee crisis in Europe. They also discussed the escalating fighting in Ukraine along with Western-backed Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

In a press conference after the meeting, Merkel and Hollande called for harmonizing asylum laws across Europe and sharing the burden of caring for refugees equally between European countries. Merkel shed crocodile tears over immigrants targeted by far-right riots at the Heisenau shelter in Germany, and Hollande insisted that immigrants would be treated as befits “democratic” Europe. In reality, however, the French and German governments are planning drastic attacks on immigrants and on fundamental democratic rights.

Imperialist-backed wars in Syria and Libya that have spread across the Middle East and large parts of the Sahel in Africa, together with the grinding poverty afflicting these countries, are driving millions of people to emigrate. In Syria alone, ten million people have been forced to flee their homes. Millions of refugees are arriving in Europe, including hundreds of thousands of immigrants who are arriving via the Mediterranean to Greece and Italy alone. The refugee crisis is now widely described as the most serious in Europe since World War II.

Authorities in Germany, where approximately 40 percent of new immigrants are seeking asylum, report that 800,000 immigrants might arrive in Germany this year. This is double the previous record of 440,000 set in 1992 after the dissolution of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

At their press conference, Merkel and Hollande demanded stepped-up implementation of plans to install detention camps in Italy and Greece, run by the European Union (EU), that would then distribute

immigrants who are accepted more equally across Europe.

These “hot spots” will be legal black holes, able to detain immigrants for up to 18 months, following common rules on deporting immigrants back to their home countries. Immigrants would be deprived of the full rights and protections afforded by the asylum laws of their host countries. If the influx of immigrants increases, even the legal limits imposed by the EU on the detention and deportation of immigrants in the camps could be waived.

The camps would also share a common list of “safe countries,” modeled on German law, from which no immigrants would be accepted.

Hollande said that German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière would welcome his French counterpart Bernard Cazeneuve in Berlin to draw up a common strategy. The pair would discuss modifying the Dublin accords that control the handling of asylum requests to EU countries.

“Germany cannot keep greeting roughly 40 percent of the refugees and asylum seekers in Europe as has been the case until the present,” de Maizière said yesterday. If something did not change, he said, the Schengen agreement might break down—apparently threatening that Germany would re-establish border controls with other EU states to block an influx of refugees coming from Greece, the Balkans or Italy.

Germany and France are threatening to put the entire Balkan region on the list of “safe countries” from which no immigrants would be accepted. This would increase pressure on governments in the Balkans to step up the brutal repression of refugees to block the flow towards Western Europe.

Hungary is building a massive border fence to stop immigrants from crossing its southern border, and

Macedonian police fought a three-day battle with refugees on the Greek-Macedonian border last week in an attempt to prevent them from crossing into the country. Ultimately, immigrants defeated the Macedonian police and were able to force passage. However, many of them, including women and children, are facing terrible conditions as they try to cross the country without food or transportation. (See, “Troops fire on refugees trying to enter Macedonia”)

Merkel will travel to Vienna Thursday for a summit with leaders of Balkan states, including Albania and Kosovo, to discuss the immigration crisis. She will ask why “so many thousands of people are coming from these countries,” her spokesman Steffen Seibert said.

The proposals being developed in Paris and Berlin, stripped of the empty invocations of concern for the plight of immigrants and for European values, testify to the deep-going decay of bourgeois democracy in Europe.

Amid an unprecedented international social crisis, methods and forms of rule that millions of people hoped Europe had consigned to the dustbin of history after the defeat of fascism are resurfacing. As Germany casts aside its post-World War II policy of military restraint, and France is developing “kill lists” of people targeted for extra-judicial assassination, European capitalism is arming itself with its own network of prison camps.

The potential conditions for the disintegration of Europe along national lines emerge ever more clearly. The partial, highly limited integration between European countries, carried out under the aegis of the EU and the Schengen agreement on border-free travel inside continental Europe, is stalling and falling apart amid escalating international tensions over refugees.

Following the discussions on refugees, Merkel and Hollande held a joint press conference with the billionaire oligarch and Ukraine's far-right president, Petro Poroshenko, to discuss the bloody civil war that emerged in Ukraine after last year's NATO-backed coup in Kiev.

At the beginning of the year, the three met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Minsk to negotiate cease-fire accords to end fighting between the Kiev regime and Russian-backed separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine, which threatened to escalate into full-scale war between NATO and Russia. This time,

however, Merkel, Hollande, and Poroshenko snubbed Putin, who was not invited to the meeting.

The meeting came amid escalating conflicts along the cease-fire line that was agreed at Minsk. Ukrainian officials reported five casualties from fire from separatist forces in recent days, while the Russian-backed separatists reported five deaths from the shelling of Donetsk.

At the press conference with Poroshenko, Merkel and Hollande sought to pressure the Kremlin to fall into line with EU policy without risking an all-out conflict with Moscow. Merkel demanded that both sides respect the Minsk accords and the withdrawal of heavy weaponry. She insisted that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) be allowed to work more freely in Ukraine, and she criticized the eastern Ukraine separatists for interfering with OSCE conflict monitors and drone flights inside the country.

Merkel pointed to several issues, including prisoner exchanges and the restoration of Russian-Ukrainian trade relations, which have not been resolved since the outbreak of fighting after the Kiev coup.

Russian officials responding by blaming the conflict on the aggressive actions of NATO and its Ukrainian proxies. “We are keeping close tabs on this meeting's preparations and will also carefully monitor its outcome,” said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. “For us, the need to put additional pressure on Kiev is obvious. We expect Germany and France—the underwriters of the Minsk agreements—to do everything possible to make sure that [the peace terms] are unconditionally fulfilled.”

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