

German chancellor demands end to “waving refugees through the borders”

By Johannes Stern
4 March 2016

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has sought to justify her policy of erecting new walls around “Fortress Europe” with humanitarian phrases—most recently in a Sunday talk show. On Tuesday, she adopted a very different tone.

At a press conference with Croatian Prime Minister Tihomir Orešković in Berlin, she commented on the refugee crisis in Greece and the Balkans with the brutality associated with Christian Social Union (CSU) leader Horst Seehofer, or officials of the nationalist AfD (Alternative for Germany).

Merkel repeatedly stated that a “policy of waving [immigrants] through” the borders, i.e., not properly checking papers and detaining refugees, had to be ended. She added that “asylum seekers have no right to choose the country where they seek asylum in Europe”. She said there were no grounds to compare the situation on the Greek-Macedonian border, where refugees have been assaulted by police, with the situation in Hungary last September.

The Chancellor stressed that Berlin would no longer accept refugees directly, and that there are “many preparations being started in Greece”. She said that so-called “hot spots”—i.e., concentration camps to register refugees run by the Greek military—were now “partly built”. Speaking on refugees attacked with tear gas at the Greek-Macedonian border crossing at Idomeni on Monday, Merkel advised them cynically to use “possible accommodation and overnight options in Greece”.

Merkel repeated her criticism of Austria and the Balkan states, which had agreed at a summit last week “to seal off” the so-called Balkan route. Instead, she stressed that this was not sufficient to implement the decisions agreed at the EU summit on 18 February.

“When I say we have to return to the Schengen

system, then that means of course that Greece has to protect the borders,” Merkel said. She insisted it was “not just a matter of protecting the Greek-Macedonian border on the Macedonian side” to prevent “new routes for refugee flows and further destabilization.” She regretted that “we did not start first with the NATO mission and better protection of external borders—with the result that there are many more people in Greece.”

In other words, for the Chancellor the problem is not that refugees in the heart of Europe are being confronted with barbed wire fences, and tear gas administered by police armed to the teeth, but rather that refugees are allowed into Europe in the first place.

Berlin is therefore working feverishly on a “common” European solution, to reduce the number of refugees “drastically and over the long term,” according to the German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière. This amounts in practice to the police-military walling off of Europe.

The military intervention in the Aegean by NATO under German leadership is currently commencing. In close cooperation with Frontex and the Greek and Turkish coast guards, its declared aim is the complete sealing off of the sea route between Turkey and Greece, which is a key crossing point for refugees seeking to flee the multiple war zones in the Middle East. A report by the ARD TV station, with the telling title “Under German leadership”, revealed that the German combat support ship, *Bonn*, a “174-meter [r] Colossus” and three other NATO warships have already been cruising in the Aegean Sea.

At the same time, Berlin is expanding its cooperation with authoritarian regimes in North Africa and Turkey. Berlin is recruiting them as gatekeepers for Europe, charged with repelling refugees at the continent’s external borders, or to deport them directly without

bureaucratic hurdles, should they manage to overcome the existing barriers of “Fortress Europe”.

De Maizière is touring North Africa to negotiate a deportation treaty with the Moroccan monarchy, the Bouteflika regime in Algeria, and the counterrevolutionary Essebsi government in Tunisia, which is full of former functionaries of dictator Zine Abedine Ben Ali, who was toppled in 2011.

At the EU summit on Monday, the Turkish government, in exchange for money and diplomatic concessions, will be requested to close its borders to refugees completely, and stop refugee boats before they leave Turkey.

Merkel is pressing ahead with her aggressive course with the backing of export-dependent German business interests, which have benefited more than any other country from the European market.

Last week, all four major German business associations—the Federal Association of German Industry (BDI), the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) and the Confederation of German Employers’ Associations (BDA)—published a joint declaration explicitly backing the policy of the Chancellor and the government “to secure and control Europe’s external borders.”

The militarization of Europe and the brutal crackdown on refugees are directly connected to an intensification of attacks on the working class. In Berlin, Oreškovi? stressed that “the Croatian government is a reform government,” which aims “to improve the investment climate in general, pay back debt and reduce the budget deficit to below 3 percent, while fulfilling the Maastricht criteria.” He hoped to “intensify cooperation” with Germany.

Oreškovi? lined up demonstratively behind Merkel. Croatia and Germany are “partner countries in the EU and Nato”, and he was “definitely prepared to support a European solution”. We must “be prepared to support the Greeks.”

He hinted that such support did not only consist of €700 million in aid already agreed, but may also include the use of soldiers. “If we need such an option, then the police will have to protect our border, and if necessary, maybe the military,” he explained.

To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>