

The European Union expands its war against refugees

By Marianne Arens
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There is growing worldwide outrage at the numbers of refugees dying in the Mediterranean and the inhumane conditions in Libyan refugee camps, where people are tortured and die horrifically. After the courageous captain of the *Sea Watch*, Carola Rackete, landed shipwrecked asylum seekers in Lampedusa, defying an Italian government ban, more than half a million people signed a petition supporting her and quickly raised €1.5 million for her legal defence. Sixty German cities and towns agreed to accept the refugees.

The EU has responded with new plans to expand its war on refugees. It is considering military operations in the civil war in Libya and in the Sahel to take over prisons and establish new concentration camps, which are referred to as “transit centres” and “disembarkation platforms.” Military patrols are to block the coast of the Maghreb. Alongside the EU Foreign and Home Affairs Ministers meetings taking place this week, more and more similar demands are being raised.

A week ago, the *Bild* ran with the headline, “Does the military have to take care of order in Libya?” It quoted retired General Lothar Domröse demanding that soldiers from EU countries be deployed to Libya to “train security protection and coastal protection.” In the same article, German Development Minister Gerd Müller (Christian Social Union, CSU) demanded that the United Nations gain access to Libya and administer the camps itself.

In the *Neue Osnabrück Zeitung* Müller demanded an immediate international “rescue mission” for the refugees in Libya. Weeping crocodile tears, he complained that people only had the choice of “dying in the camps through violence or hunger, dying of thirst in the desert or drowning in the Mediterranean (...) The EU has switched off its spotlights.” What was needed now was “a joint humanitarian initiative by Europe and

the United Nations to rescue refugees on Libyan soil. The new EU Commission must act immediately.”

Leader of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) Christian Lindner told *Die Welt* newspaper, “The solution must be that we create decent housing and legal escape routes to Europe inside North Africa, with the United Nations refugee agency.” Shipwrecked people had to be rescued, but they would have to be “returned to the starting point of their journey,” i.e. to Libya. “We have to face the truth,” said Lindner, “among the refugees are also economic migrants who are not being persecuted who have no legal right to stay”.

The head of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bamf), Hans-Eckhard Sommer, spoke up on broadcaster WDR saying he was in favour of “a coalition of European states creating a protection zone in Libya” in order “to take care of the people” there and bring them back to their countries of origin. He reasoned that “we must prevent people from facing mortal danger.”

Mathias Middelberg, the internal affairs political spokesman of the Christian Democrat parliamentary group, was determined to “protect” African migrants with brute force, i.e. to keep them out of Europe with rifles and barbed wire. He told news agency DPA, “In the medium term, we need to implement the decisions of the EU Council of June 2018,” and that meant “even greater cooperation with countries of origin and transit to reduce migration” as well as “disembarkation platforms on the Mediterranean coast.”

Middelberg was referring to the EU summit of June 2018, when EU governments decided to completely seal off fortress Europe and force migrants into de facto concentration camps in Africa.

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn demanded that the EU-backed and supported Libyan

“unity government” should now “finally allow camps to be built under the umbrella of UNHCR and IOM [International Organization of Migration]”. According to Asselborn, there was “urgent need for about six reception centres for every 1,000 migrants.”

Finally, David McAllister (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), who chairs the European Affairs committee of the EU parliament, expressed the same idea. He was also the election manager of the German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen in her candidacy for the office of EU Commission President. In the *Bild* newspaper McAllister explicitly advocated “additional operations in cooperation with NATO” and “joint patrols of EU member states and neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean (e.g. Tunisia).”

The demands and plans being expressed indicate a clear pattern: the EU wants to use the refugee crisis as an opportunity to invade North Africa by military force and take control in Libya and other countries. It wants to construct huge concentration camps there, in which migrants can be returned who have already reached Europe.

The EU military advance into Africa, however, pursues even wider goals: access to oil, natural gas, rare earths and other raw materials, as well as the occupation of strategic positions against rivals China and the USA. More and more, the EU is turning into a monstrous military union. The fate of migrants is the last thing that worries the EU politicians.

In their attempts to get out of Libya, around 360 migrants have been on a hunger strike for eight days. In early July, they survived the attack on the Tadhura detention centre near Tripoli. Over fifty detained refugees were killed and around 150 injured when a rocket hit the camp. The hunger strikers, who fear further attacks, are also refusing to be transferred to other prisons because they do not want to give up their hope of reaching Europe.

In sharp contrast to the EU’s plans, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) is calling for the immediate evacuation of all imprisoned migrants and refugees from Libya. According to findings of the UNHCR and the IOM, about 50,000 registered refugees and an estimated 800,000 other migrants are said to be caught up in a country being engulfed by civil war. So far, the UNHCR has only been able to get some 600 out of Libya, including taking 295 to Italy and 289 to Niger.

The migrants who are on hunger strike in Tadhura have once again demonstrated to the world the murderous conditions that face people trying to escape on their dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. According to IOM data, 4,068 people have reached mainland Italy or Malta this year, while 3,750 have been picked up by the Libyan Coast Guard and taken back to the torture camps.

By July 15, 682 people had died attempting the crossing. On average, this is three to four people a day drowning, dying of thirst, or perishing from lack of help.

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