

European Union Threatens Summary Mass Deportations of Refugees

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Yesterday, European Council President Donald Tusk issued a blunt warning that the European Union (EU) intends to seal off its borders and summarily deport masses of desperate refugees fleeing imperialist wars that are devastating the Middle East.

Speaking from Athens after meeting with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, Tusk said:

“I want to appeal to all potential illegal economic migrants, wherever you are from. Do not come to Europe. Do not risk your lives and your money. It is all for nothing. Greece, or any other European country, will no longer be a transit country.”

Tusk then traveled on to Turkey. At a joint press conference with Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Ankara, he called for setting up a system for summary mass deportations of refugees from Europe. “We agree that the refugee flows still remain far too high,” Tusk said. “To many in Europe, the most promising method seems to be a fast and large-scale mechanism to ship back irregular migrants arriving in Greece.”

Tusk’s attack on refugees as “irregular” or “illegal economic migrants” is a slander against hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children fleeing bloody conflicts stoked by the US and European powers. Such attacks are designed to allow the EU to shift far to the right, adopting policies previously associated with neo-fascistic forces. Fundamental democratic rights, like the right to asylum, are to be trampled, and extrajudicial deportations based on racial or national origin are to become EU policy.

The flow of refugees from war-torn Syria and Iraq is continuing to increase, with 131,724 arriving in Greece in the first two months of 2016 alone. This is more than the number that fled to Europe in the first six months of 2015. Under these conditions, the hostility of all factions of the European bourgeoisie to the refugees is coming fully into the open.

Tusk’s comments came a day after NATO commander General Philip Breedlove accused refugees of being enemies of NATO in the service of Russia and Syria, which are “deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve.”

No fabrication is too grotesque for the EU powers. A conference organized by Austria and nine Balkan countries agreed to designate all refugees fleeing Afghanistan, a country devastated by an ongoing civil war and NATO military occupation, as “economic migrants.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who at the beginning of the refugee crisis tried to falsely align herself with popular sympathy for refugees by stating that Berlin would welcome large numbers of them, signaled her agreement with a hard line against immigrants on Tuesday. (See: [German chancellor demands end to “waving refugees through the borders”](#))

“There is not a right for a refugee to say: ‘I want to get asylum in a particular country in the European Union,’” she declared. Berlin’s support for the Schengen treaty of free movement of people inside Europe is based on Greece not allowing refugees into Europe in the first place, she stressed: “When I say we have to return to the Schengen system, then that means of course that Greece has to protect the borders.”

Tens of thousands of refugees seeking to travel north towards Germany are now trapped in Greece, as Austria and the Balkan states refuse to admit more than a handful of refugees through the border each day. Greek authorities estimated that the number of refugees trying to reach central Europe but trapped in Greece could soon rise to 70,000.

Thousands of refugees have arrived at the Greek-Macedonian border since Macedonian police brutally cracked down on migrants trying to cross the border on Monday. Approximately 12,000 to 15,000 immigrants are therefore blocked at a camp near the border crossing at Idomeni.

“This is a makeshift camp. The transit camp is already at full capacity so people are setting up their tents wherever they can,” Al Jazeera’s Hoda Abdel-Hamid reported from Idomeni. “They’re going to the woods to set up fires when the temperatures fall dramatically. ... People are frustrated with each day that passes, they’re getting more and more tired.”

A class gulf separates the chauvinist reaction to the refugee crisis by the European ruling elites from the sentiments of masses of working people. In Athens, workers are donating food and toys, and unemployed workers are donating their time in soup kitchens.

Ethnic conflicts and resentments inside the EU are continuing to build, however, as each national government is seeking to block as many refugees as possible from arriving on its territory and is attempting to send as many of them as possible to other countries.

Greece’s Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) government, which last year imposed a savage austerity package on Greek workers at the behest of the EU, is again playing a reactionary role.

Greek officials are forcing refugees stopped at the Macedonian border to head south to camps in Athens. Media coverage of the camps has been blocked as the government deploys the army to build them and police the refugees trapped there.

After Greece took the unprecedented step of withdrawing its ambassador to Austria to protest Vienna’s role in preventing refugees from leaving Greece, divisions are now erupting over a German-led plan to deploy warships to stop the flow of refugees from Turkey across the Aegean Sea to Greece.

The deployment, which threatens to cut off Russian access to the Mediterranean, was announced early in February in the context of NATO’s broader military buildup against Russia over the Syrian and Ukraine crises. It came only weeks after a Turkish fishing vessel nearly rammed a Russian warship in the Aegean Sea.

While it was aimed at Russia, the deployment has run afoul of escalating divisions among the NATO powers themselves. Last week, NATO officials were still trying to determine the parameters of the naval deployment, amid bitter territorial disputes between Greece and Turkey. After violations of Greek air space by Turkish fighters, during which Greek and Turkish planes engaged in mock dogfights, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that “Greek and Turkish forces will not operate in each other’s territorial waters and airspace.”

On Wednesday, AFP cited multiple anonymous diplomatic sources as stating that Turkish authorities were blocking the deployment to the Aegean. One said that “the Turks refused” to allow NATO vessels into their territorial waters, demanding that the operation’s German commander, Rear Admiral Jorg Klein, “go to Ankara to determine the area where [NATO warships] might deploy.”

The source also denounced Turkey for “showing little to no interest” in taking back migrants picked up by NATO warships at sea as they attempt the crossing to Greece.

Turkish and German government sources denied the AFP report.

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