

Germany Moves to Seal External Borders against Refugees

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German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière declared this week that refugees arriving on the German border will be deported back to the first European Union country they entered, in a reversal of policies that have been in place since August.

Germany's move to strengthen its border regime will have catastrophic humanitarian consequences, intensify tensions in Europe and increase the danger of war. It reflects the fact that a small, right-wing cabal around de Maizière and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble is increasingly determining the German government's refugee policies.

De Maizière said Tuesday that Syrian refugees arriving on the German border were being treated according to the Dublin agreement, and that this had been the case since October 21. The Dublin III protocol provides that refugees must make an asylum application in the country they enter first in the EU. If they make an application in another country, they can be deported to the original country of entry. The only exception currently is Greece, according to the ministry.

In addition, refugees from Syria are not being provided protection in accordance with the Geneva Conventions on refugees. The vast majority of Syrian refugees, who traveled through Turkey or other allegedly "safe countries of origin" during their journey, will only receive subsidiary protection. They will receive the right to reside for just one year rather than three years, and they cannot bring their family members to Germany.

The ministry thereby reversed its decision of August 21 to suspend the Dublin regulations and grant Syrian refugees protection in accordance with the Geneva Convention on refugees. Three months ago, the opening of Germany's borders was justified on the basis of humanitarianism, because tens of thousands of refugees were gathering on the EU's external borders and could not be properly cared for.

The decision has not been overturned because the humanitarian situation has improved. On the contrary, conditions facing refugees in Greece and on the Balkan route have deteriorated further. Regardless, the German government has decided to junk its humanitarian gestures and to aggressively deter refugees. This decision has wide-ranging implications.

In essence, Germany is rejecting all responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria. This is because, according to the Dublin regulations, Greece, Italy and Hungary would be responsible for the vast majority migrants. Concretely, this could result in large numbers of people being stranded in the Balkans and on the EU's external borders. The

result would not only lead to a humanitarian catastrophe, but also put into question the continued existence of the EU.

On Monday Jean Asselborn, foreign minister of Luxembourg, warned of precisely such a scenario. "The European Union could break apart. This can take place with incredible speed, if closed borders instead of solidarity is the rule internally as well as externally," he said. "This false nationalism can lead to a real war." In particular, decisions by Sweden or Germany to close their borders would lead to uncontrollable developments in the Balkans.

The Joint Analysis and Strategy Centre for Illegal Migration (GASiM), which has close ties to Germany's security apparatus, claims that such a situation could result in borders being stormed, according to an internal paper reported on by *Welt am Sonntag*. "A dead end in the Balkans could produce panic among refugees and authorities." At the same time, it noted that the "prevention of any crossing of the land borders" would only be "realistic with high levels of personnel and technical resources." Authorities working within GASiM include the German intelligence agencies, several police authorities and the federal office for migration and refugees.

The German government is striving to implement such a closure, even though an interior ministry spokesman stated that there would be "no turning back at the borders," only regulated deportations. The Swedish government responded Wednesday to the German measure by announcing its own border controls. Like Hungary, Slovenia has begun building a border fence.

Criticisms from the press and the opposition that the interior ministry's plans are impossible to implement because hardly any refugees arriving in Germany have been registered in another country are worthless.

In fact, the German government is currently working hard to establish so-called "hot spots" on the EU's external borders, where all arriving refugees will be registered by EU border protection officers. The first "hot spot" on the Italian island of Lampedusa is already in operation. Additional registration centres are planned on the Balkan route.

The interior ministry's decision to revert to the Dublin regulations is in keeping with the agenda of the right-wing conservative parties, the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union. The news magazine *Der Spiegel* cited a draft of the main motion to the CSU's party congress, to be held next week, in which the newly announced regulations are found reproduced practically word for word.

The Dublin agreement had to be "fully brought back into force so that asylum seekers who have travelled through safe third countries can be sent back," the resolution states. "The bringing of family members must be suspended to the greatest extent possible. Where this is legally not possible, it must be restricted to the fewest possible cases."

On the question of the refusal to recognise refugees according to the Geneva Conventions, the interior ministry is also following the CSU's line, which states,

"This includes differentiating between protection according to the Geneva Conventions and subsidiary protection. It is not the same if someone as a relative must fear for their life because they are a member of a persecuted group, or if they have made their way to us from noncombat areas or safe

refugee camps.”

The decision to make the CSU’s line the centrepiece of German refugee policy was reached without any consultation with the chief of the Chancellor’s Office, Peter Altmeier (CDU), who is formally responsible for coordinating refugee policy. The co-governing Social Democrats also said they had not been informed about the changes.

Despite this, there were no serious protests against the interior ministry’s wide-ranging measures. SPD Deputy Chairman Ralf Stegner merely accused de Maizière of “a lack of communication.” His actions will have little consequence in any case. CDU/CSU fraction leader Volker Kauder denied there was any disagreement between the interior ministry and the chancellor’s office. “Angela Merkel has had a clear idea for a long time how to respond to the movement of refugees,” he said.

The right wing of the CDU/CSU has stepped up its offensive. Schäuble (CDU) has compared refugees arriving to an “avalanche” which must be stopped quickly. He thereby directly lined up with those conducting right-wing populist agitation against refugees.

The ruling elite is responding to the refugee crisis, which they themselves provoked with their wars in the Middle East, by shifting sharply to the right. The inhuman measures directed at refugees, the most vulnerable members of society, are ultimately aimed at the entire working class of Europe.

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