

EU intensifies collaboration to deport refugees

Elisabeth Zimmermann
28 December 2002

European Union interior ministers have intensified their collaboration for the more rapid and efficient deportation of refugees. At their last meeting at the end of November in Brussels they agreed to charter more joint flights in order to transport asylum-seekers whose applications had been rejected by their countries of their origin.

In the second week of December the EU commission announced its intention of supporting this project via the EU refugee fund, which is to contribute millions towards such flights and towards payments “rewarding” those countries which take back refugees.

Chris Patten, the EU commissioner responsible for foreign policy matters, and Antonio Vitorino, EU commissioner for domestic policies and justice, presented some statistics. During the next seven years, almost 935 million euros will be set aside for deportation purposes.

In 2002, the EU commission spent 13.7 million euros on such charter flights; the year before, it was 8.2 million euros. In addition, the 15 EU member states used 38 percent of their joint refugee fund to finance the “voluntary return” of refugees. For the current year this fund totalled 45.8 million euros. Vitorino called for an increase in order to finance not only “voluntary” returns, but also enforced deportations.

There have now been 17 million euros set aside for the return of 100,000 refugees to Afghanistan in spring 2003, which means that the government of Afghanistan will receive 170 euros per citizen who returns. According to the EU, this money should be used to finance jobs or training programs. However, given the ridiculously low sum and the catastrophic situation in Afghanistan, such measures are impossible. The flights to Afghanistan will be financed by the individual EU countries where the refugees are presently residing.

The EU commission is negotiating further agreements on the return of refugees with Russia, Pakistan,

Morocco and Ukraine. The interior ministers of the EU are calling on the commission to hold further negotiations with Albania, Algeria, China and Turkey.

Vitorino pointed to numerous cooperation agreements already in place against illegal immigration into the EU. In particular, he stressed the intensification of controls at the borders to Eastern Europe and the support given to Morocco, which received 40 million euros from the Mediterranean Program of the EU to improve the surveillance of its borders.

While all European countries are investing billions to modernize their armies and to improve their police and intelligence apparatuses, they claim there is no money for the support of refugees or the integration of immigrants. Even finances from the EU refugee fund, which is supposed to provide social assistance to those seeking asylum, are being used to expel refugees from the EU as quickly as possible.

The plan to deport 100,000 refugees to Afghanistan illustrates the cynical treatment meted out by EU governments to the victims of the foreign policy pursued by the imperialist governments of both the US and Europe. Two decades of war and civil war—and the war led by the US in the name of the fight against terrorism in October 2001—have devastated the country, which is among the poorest in the world. International troops have been stationed in Kabul for one year in order to protect Hamid Karzai, the president installed by the US, and his government. Special units of the US army are operating in Afghanistan. But almost nothing has been done to support the economic reconstruction of the country, to create a civil infrastructure, or provide education or healthcare, food or housing.

According to a recent study, 16 out of 1,000 women in Afghanistan die during pregnancy or when giving birth. One in four children dies before his or her fifth birthday. Four out of ten children who die fall victim to diseases which could easily be cured if there were basic

healthcare.

The international conference on Afghanistan, which met near Bonn, Germany, last year, agreed on aid for the country, but hardly any assistance has materialized so far. This is justified by the poor security situation in the country. But lack of security and basic facilities do not count as obstacles when it comes to deportations. Amnesty International has criticized the deportation plans of the EU, saying that the situation in Afghanistan is still extremely insecure.

In Germany, thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees who received asylum status last year could be affected by future deportations. Many of them have been living in Germany for years.

During the rule of the Taliban, most refugees from Afghanistan were denied asylum because the German authorities claimed that there was no danger of persecution by the Afghan state. In 1999 and 2000, only 1.6 and 0.9 percent respectively of all asylum-seekers from Afghanistan were granted official status. During this period, Germany was governed by a coalition government of the Social Democratic Party and the Greens which first took power in late 1998.

In February 2001, the German Federal Constitutional Court decided that there was indeed “quasi-state” persecution in Afghanistan. From July 2001, the number of those granted asylum status began to rise for a short time. More than 63 percent of all asylum-seekers from Afghanistan were recognized as refugees. Many of them had renewed their applications following the decision of the constitutional court.

Shortly afterwards, the US began its war against Afghanistan. The overthrow of the Taliban and the installation of the Karzai regime again endangered the status of Afghan refugees in Germany. The aid organisation “Pro Asyl” reported on the year 2002:

“People eligible for asylum and refugees who have been accepted by convention now have to fear that the federal authorities will annul the grounds for their asylum and launch administrative proceedings reviewing an objection to their present status—this amounts to a catastrophe for those who had to wait for years to have their rights granted. Many people whose presence has been tolerated for years are now threatened with deportation to return with nothing to an officially pacified country.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact