

After the deaths in Ceuta and Melilla

European Union agrees to set up holding camps for refugees

Part 1

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The following is the first of a two-part article.

Nowhere is the essentially inhumane character of the European Union (EU) more apparent than in its migration and refugee policies. While attempting to gain refuge in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in recent weeks, at least 14 African refugees have been shot by Spanish and Moroccan security forces or died trying to scale the three- to six-metre-high NATO barbed wire fences. Hundreds more have been wounded or arrested by the Moroccan police.

In recent months, large groups of refugees have tried to breach these border fences in order to enter EU territory. The Spanish government has responded by sending in the military to buttress the border barriers. The EU has also asked the Moroccan government to toughen their measures against the refugees.

Consequently, the Moroccan security service has conducted raids into the refugee camps that have sprung up in woods around the enclaves. Thousands of refugees have been arrested, tied up, shoved into buses and driven into the desert to be left to their fate without food or water. How many lives this barbaric treatment has cost remains unknown.

Photographs of strips of clothing and flesh caught on the fences at Ceuta and Melilla, together with reports about the fate of the desperate refugees—some of whom had been on the move for over a year—have deeply shocked the European population. Nevertheless, the EU has issued only a few cynical words of regret.

Franco Frattini, deputy chairman of the European Commission and commissioner for Justice and Internal Affairs, declared on September 30: “Loss of human life is always a tragedy. But frontier guards are also risking their lives, rescuing people who want to cross the Mediterranean into the EU illegally. The European Commission will always make a resolute stand for the maintenance of human rights and strive to prevent further loss of life.”

However, such a statement is totally fraudulent. Instead, the

constant upgrading of EU perimeter borders and the military patrolling of sea and land routes into the EU have led to the deaths of thousands of refugees in recent years. The relief organization Doctors without Borders estimates that 6,300 migrants seeking refuge have died at the gates of Ceuta and Melilla and in the Mediterranean between Morocco and Spain.

Although the Civil Guard, patrolling the Spanish enclaves’ border fences on the Moroccan coast, are said to have received no order to shoot, eyewitnesses report that they opened fire directly on refugees at the end of September. Turi, a refugee from the Ivory Coast, told the German Internet publication *Spiegel Online*: “One of the people shot dead was my friend. I saw it all. Just as he reached the top of the ladder, a Spanish policeman drew his pistol and shot him in the chest.”

Moreover, the EU is exploiting the current attempts of masses of migrants to reach European territory in order to make “fortress Europe” even more impenetrable and to dismantle EU provisions for the protection of refugees. Camps are to be established in Africa and former Soviet countries where refugees will be interned to prevent them from having the chance to enter Europe.

Such an outsourcing of the obligation of refugee protection in these extraterritorial camps, together with a rigorous deportation policy without an initial scrutiny of asylum claims, represent a dramatic break from the Geneva Conventions for Refugees and European human rights conventions in general.

At the EU Justice and Internal Affairs council meeting on October 12, the EU interior ministers unconditionally agreed to the plans of the commission for the erection of extraterritorial refugee camps. Furthermore, an allocation of €40 million to the Moroccan government was approved as an immediate measure to promote its fight against refugees. This will enable Morocco to purchase speedboats and jeeps, as well as nocturnal surveillance and radar equipment from the EU to ensure thorough safeguarding of the borders.

On the initiative of the EU, almost 11,000 soldiers and police

in Morocco alone are in force to combat so-called “illegal” immigrants, whose only “crime” consists of trying to find haven in Europe from social misery and political persecution. The government in the Moroccan capital of Rabat hopes to obtain even more assistance through its readiness to cooperate with the EU. Having inspected the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla at the beginning of October, an EU commission of experts has already promised logistical and financial support for the construction of internment camps in Morocco.

The EU also intends to proceed apace with the realization of the commission’s plans for the implementation of “Regional Shelter Programmes,” whereby refugees will be given accommodation “near home.” The first of these “Regional Shelter Programmes” will operate in Tanzania and the Ukraine, but later they will be extended to Moldova, Belarus, Afghanistan, Somalia and North Africa.

In line with this, an announcement from the commission declared: “Regional shelter programmes will be promoted to strengthen the capacity of the regions in question to provide shelter, to improve the protection of the refugee population there and achieve lasting solutions to refugee problems.” By “lasting solutions” the EU means “return to homeland, local integration or resettlement in a third country if the first two lasting solutions are not possible.”

This simply means that only a tiny number of refugees will be accepted into the EU. The “Regional Shelter Programmes” will serve above all to contain refugees in the affected regions. Close cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been scheduled to achieve precisely this goal. The UNHCR is to select hardship cases for whom the doors to Europe might be opened.

Flattered by the importance conceded to it by the EU, the UNHCR promptly declared itself ready to cooperate in the battle against refugees. The UNHCR’s William Spindler stated, “we welcome the involvement of the EU and its readiness to improve asylum in Europe.”

This is sheer hypocrisy. The UNHCR will have to drastically reduce food rations for over 400,000 refugees in Tanzania, where one of the planned pilot projects is to take place. The EU only wants to provide a modest €4 million for the “Regional Shelter Programme” envisaged for that country.

The “Regional Shelter Programmes” have nothing at all to do with a progressive upgrading of the system of asylum. Rather, they will result in an expansion of the list of the so-called “secure countries of origin and transit countries” so that it will also be possible for the latest refugees to make it into Europe to face immediate deportation.

Reporting for the magazine *L’Espresso* about the reception camp on the Italian island of Lampedusa, the Italian journalist Fabrizio Gatti made clear what refugees in camps in Africa and the former Soviet countries will have to expect. Gatti arranged for himself to be rescued from sea and taken for an Iraqi Kurd refugee by border authorities. His report detailed the scandalous

level of hygiene in the camp that was designed for 190 refugees, but was massively overcrowded in the summer months. Showers and toilets were not separate, there was no toilet paper and in some cases no flush toilets. During interrogation, refugees had to line up naked. They were beaten by the police and Muslims were forced to look at pornographic pictures. After eight days, Gatti was finally requested to leave Italy—without any consideration of his possible reasons for asylum.

As exposed in a recent report by the human rights organisation Amnesty International, the situation in refugee camps in Greece is not very different. The report states: “Some of them (refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.) were shot dead at the border. Others, accused of ‘illegal’ entry, were immediately locked up without receiving any chance at all to apply for asylum. Conditions in detention centres in some parts of the country fail to meet international standards and legal requirements.” According to *Amnesty International*, maltreatment and raping of refugees are also occurring quite commonly in Greece.

If camps in the EU are already reminiscent of the conditions in Guantánamo or Abu Ghraib, one hardly dares to imagine what conditions migrants will have to face in Libya, Tunisia, Morocco or Russia. Tunisia already has 13 deportation detention centres, 11 of which operate in strictest secrecy. Moreover, it is customary for refugees deported from Europe to Libya and Tunisia to be abandoned in the desert.

The envisioned camps will provide only the most elemental provisions and refugees will be left to eke out a miserable existence. EU Commissioner Frattini has openly raised the issue of the bothersome cost factor posed by refugees for the EU. In a press conference on October 12, he declared: “Why should we continue with a system that is so time consuming and expensive? We are spending billions of euros on provision for asylum seekers.”

Having been involved for years in the planning of a worldwide system of camps, the EU is now implementing its “Regional Shelter Programmes” so that refugees can be kept away from European territory.

To be continued



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