

The EU strengthens “Fortress Europe” against migration due to climate change

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The European Union is responding to the present and projected catastrophic effects of climate change on the most vulnerable populations of the world, and their inevitable migration in order to survive, with an intensification of already draconian anti-immigration controls.

The EU, in alliance with the governments of transit countries, is attempting to imprison affected populations in ghettos of impoverishment and famine. It has erected militarised barriers on its borders and instituted police-state measures internally to bar residence to workers from impoverished countries, which have been subject to the ravages of the great powers and their corporate elites, as well as the national ruling classes.

EU foreign affairs chief and Spanish social democrat Javier Solana reported in March 2008 that “climate change and international security” raised concerns and the need to secure European interests in those regions. His remarks were prompted by a report from the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), which warns of the impact of “climate change as a security risk.”

Solana affirms: “Climate change is best viewed as a threat multiplier which exacerbates existing trends, tensions and instability. The core challenge is that climate change threatens to overburden states and regions which are already fragile and conflict prone. It is important to recognise that the risks are not just of a humanitarian nature; they also include political and security risks that directly affect European interests.”

He continues: “Those parts of the populations that already suffer from poor health conditions, unemployment or social exclusion are rendered more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which could amplify or trigger migration within and between countries.... Such migration may increase conflicts in transit and destination areas. Europe must expect substantially increased migratory pressure.”

On April 8, EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel expressed similar anxiety at the “looming world food crisis, which is less visible than the oil crisis, but has the potential to cause a real economic and humanitarian tsunami in

Africa.”

An article in the *New York Times*, on January 14, reported: “Last year roughly 31,000 Africans tried to reach the Canary Islands, a prime transit point to Europe, in more than 900 boats. About 6,000 died or disappeared, according to one estimate cited by the United Nations.”

As major reasons for this exodus, the article cited the overfishing of West Africa’s offshore waters by European companies, which have bought the rights to do so from African governments, and the resulting destruction of the livelihoods of African fishing communities.

Solana also made a veiled reference to the social devastation caused by neo-colonial wars of conquest carried out by the US and its partners in Iraq and Afghanistan: “One of the most significant potential conflicts over resources arises from intensified competition over access to, and control over, energy resources. That in itself is, and will continue to be, a cause of instability. However, because much of the world’s hydrocarbon reserves are in regions vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and because many oil and gas producing states already face significant social economic and demographic challenges, instability is likely to increase.”

The WBGU emphasises that in these regions, “Internal migration continues to predominate, although in recent years there has been increased international migration, including illegal immigration into southern Europe.”

Fortress Europe’s “iron wall”

The EU is raising an iron wall along its borders: No one can enter without a visa. Foreigners are put on surveillance lists and from 2009 will have to provide their biometric details throughout the EU, even if they are coming for a short stay.

A BBC report reveals that the “EU has 1,792 designated external border crossing points with controls, 665 air border crossing points, 871 sea borders and 246 land borders, 300 million crossings per year at these points, 160 million crossings by EU citizens, 60 million by non-EU citizens without a visa and 80 million by non-EU citizens with a

visa. An estimated 8 million illegal immigrants reside in the EU, half of whom entered in legally but overstayed.”

The EU has set up its own increasingly militarised European Border Control Agency called FRONTEX, with a 45 million-euro budget for 2008. It has developed a surveillance system (Eurosur) to monitor immigrants’ movements via satellites and aerial drones as well as Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs).

No-Racism.net comments: “FRONTEX represents a militarised security regime in which police, border control, migration authorities, army and secret services are forming a more and more integrated complex of repression, dividing the world along hierarchies between rich and poor, between [western] Europe and ‘the others,’ between those who have rights, those who have less rights and those who have no rights at all.”

FRONTEX also operates from African countries in order to prevent illegal departures, focusing mainly on the Canary Islands and Mediterranean and Black Sea routes. “Fortress Europe...is a reality,” commented Irene Khan, Amnesty International’s secretary general, during a press conference in Brussels after talks with EU officials on April 15. “Access to Europe is very difficult and the initial border of the European Union is being pushed further and further away,” she said, pointing to the rescue operations of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, patrols in Senegal and increasing EU cooperation with transit countries.

France’s minister of immigration, Brice Hortefeux, has been visiting EU countries to drum up support for a “common immigration pact” with 20 African countries by the end of 2009. He stated: “We have already signed agreements with Senegal, Gabon, Benin, and the Congo and we have begun discussions with Mali, Tunisia and Morocco. Egypt and Chad have just informed us that they are interested.”

Giving the example of Benin, Hortefeux said that he was offering the government the miserable bribe of 150 “Competence and Talent” cards per year, enabling students to study in France, plus 3 million euros “to help develop the country’s health service.”

A similar agreement with Gabon on “co-development and the joint management of migration movements,” was already adopted by France’s National Assembly on April 10. It had been signed in Libreville on July 5, 2007.

Hortefeux also stated: “Obviously countries such as Libya and also Morocco will ask Europe to contribute to some of the cost of protecting their frontiers. I am conscious of the effort already made by the Moroccans, who thus deploy about 12,000 men to prevent massive movements of illegals to the Canaries.”

Internal repression of immigration within the EU

On April 25, the EU parliament and its member states initially agreed on the “EU Returns Directive,” which regulates the deportation of undocumented immigrants, including failed asylum seekers. A maximum detention period of 6 months has been established, and repatriation to the country of origin, with a five-year ban on re-entry to the EU for five years. Keeping immigrants in detention for up to 18 months, if there is a delay obtaining the necessary documentation from their countries, is being considered. The EU parliament is expected to vote on the “EU Detention Directive” on June 4.

From July 2008, more than 10 million undocumented migrants’ lives will be affected by this new immigration policy: They can be detained without charge. Their only crime is not having a visa or valid residence document.

At present, detention conditions vary in the EU: France has a 30-day limit, and Britain and some other countries have indefinite detention periods.

The *International Herald Tribune* reports: “There are now 224 detention camps scattered across the European Union; altogether they can house more than 30,000 people—asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants awaiting deportation—who are often held in administrative detention for as long as 18 months. In a number of EU countries, there is no upper limit on detention length.”

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has pinpointed Greece as a country where “reception conditions...continue to fall short of international and European standards.”

None of the major powers are capable or willing to make common efforts to resolve problems of climate change and the environment and their social consequences. This is an impossibility under capitalism. Neither can or will they give up the brutal competition for markets and raw materials. Thus, the flood of human beings seeking minimal economic security will continue, and the EU’s solution to the crisis is more repression and additional police powers.



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