

EU tightens barriers against migrants after Lampedusa tragedy

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Even before all the bodies had been removed from the wreck of the boat that sank off the coast of Lampedusa, killing more than 300, the European Union (EU) announced a tightening of measures against immigrants on Europe's external borders.

Last Thursday, a large majority of deputies in the European parliament adopted the European Border Surveillance System (Eurosur) programme. It includes high-tech border surveillance and further measures to block immigrants from entering Europe.

Last Tuesday, a conference of interior and justice ministers accepted German interior minister Hans-Peter Friedrich's demand that nothing should change in EU refugee policy. They dismissed suggestions by some media outlets that legal opportunities could be offered to refugees from wars in Afghanistan, Syria, Africa or Pakistan, and proposals for changes to the Dublin II accord.

The Dublin II agreement specifies that refugees can only apply for asylum in the country where they first arrive. It is the spearhead of a huge deportation drive within the EU, ensuring that asylum seekers hardly have a chance to obtain a hearing of their application.

On Friday, another ship capsized off Lampedusa, likely causing 50 more deaths. Although some leading European politicians have shed crocodile tears over the drowning of more than 400 refugees, the EU has rejected any easing of its asylum policy.

The Eurosur programme adopted by the European parliament is to begin operating by December. It monitors Europe's external borders with drones, satellite search systems, offshore censors and biometric identity checks against "illegal" travelers. Information obtained by Eurosur is to be forwarded to the Frontex border protection agency, which coordinates measures to intercept migrant boats long before they reach

Europe and force them back to Africa.

After the deaths of hundreds of migrants in the Mediterranean, EU immigration commissioner Cecilia Malmström tried to sell Eurosur as an improved system to save lives at sea. This is a sham. The text of the regulation that was adopted says that Eurosur's aim is the "detection, prevention and pursuit of illegal immigration and cross-border criminality."

Eurosur is not limited to the EU. Outside countries are to be actively involved in persecuting refugees. An agreement has already been concluded with the Libyan government on the use of drones and satellites for surveillance. At the insistence of the EU, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt will also participate in Eurosur.

Eurosur is estimated to cost €340 million by 2020, though critics have given estimates of €1 billion. Anthropologist Hans Luch appropriately described the surveillance programme in a piece in the *New York Times* as "the dream of security fanatics and international arms corporations."

However, Eurosur will be a nightmare for migrants. The build-up on the EU's borders means that they will have to use ever smaller and less seaworthy boats, taking more dangerous and circuitous routes. The risk of paying an attempt to flee to Europe with one's life will rise rapidly, even though the EU states themselves have forced people to flee by participating in wars in Afghanistan, Syria, and Africa.

The struggle against migrants and so-called illegal immigrants is supported by a broad alliance of all Europe's major parties. Hardliners like German interior minister Friedrich are not the only ones repeating the slogan "the boat is full." In Britain, Labour Party leader Ed Miliband has encouraged anti-immigrant sentiment, and in France, Socialist Party interior minister Manuel Valls is seeking to eradicate Roma settlements and

forcibly deport them.

In the European parliament, the social democrats voted with the Christian democrats and conservatives for the Eurosur surveillance programme. Birgit Sippel, a deputy for the German SPD, even praised Eurosur in the parliamentary debate as “an opportunity for migrants to [gain] secure access to Europe,” since the saving of lives at sea was taken up as one of Eurosur’s additional aims.

Although the Green Party fraction voted against the Eurosur regulation, this was not out of principled considerations, but rather because they had failed with their own draft, which sought to insert the rescuing of migrants more prominently in the text. The Greens sought to conceal the military build-up on Europe’s borders with a humanitarian fig leaf, in order to divert attention from EU violence against migrants.

Green deputy Franziska Keller said she hoped for improved adherence to human rights by Frontex, because a “human rights commissioner” was put in place in 2011. She also called for the creation of an EU “border commission,” to better coordinate border protection responsibilities.

In fact, the social democrats and Greens bear significant responsibility for the inhumane treatment of refugees. It was no coincidence that Frontex was founded in 2004, when the social democrats and Greens were in government in Berlin.

It was SPD interior minister Otto Schily who, with Green Party support, practically dictated the text that today forms the operational basis of Frontex. Since then, reliable sources estimate that 10,000 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean. The unreported figure is likely much higher.

The “secure third state regulation,” which considerably simplifies the procedure for forcing immigrants back to their country of origin, was also brought in by the social democrats. They supported such an amendment to the German constitution in 1993 after a right-wing mob set fire to homes for asylum seekers.

The “secure third state regulation” supports the Dublin II accord and acts as a model to encourage the shabby treatment of migrants across Europe. Refugees are labelled as economic migrants and “bogus asylum seekers.” In this way, anti-immigrant views and right-wing positions are encouraged, which in turn boosts

neo-Nazi groups and drives the political climate to the right.



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