

German interior minister calls for refugee camps in North Africa

Martin Kreickenbaum
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For weeks, Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) has been trying to win support for his proposal to set up refugee camps that would be maintained by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) in North Africa.

He thus takes up an initiative launched more than ten years ago by former British Prime Minister and Labour Party leader Tony Blair and the then-Social Democratic Party (SPD) Interior Minister Otto Schily.

In a television interview on *ZDF's Morgenmagazin* last month, de Maiziere explained his plans for such camps, describing them in his typically cynical manner as “welcoming and departure centres”. He said that “what we really need we’ve discussed with EU interior ministers: in the transit countries we need to construct such things as welcoming and departure centres. The UNHCR, the UN’s international refugee agency, could run them and decide who should return (to their homeland) and who can come to Europe”.

Whereas Schily and Blair’s plan to establish internment camps for refugees in Africa sent the media into paroxysms ten years ago, de Maiziere’s plans hardly cause a ripple today. Only a few human rights organisations have criticised them. Interviewed in the *tageszeitung* daily paper, Günter Burkhardt, director of the ProAsyl refugee support organisation, expressed alarm at the “apocalyptic vision” of “gigantic tent cities in which hundreds of thousands of people would have to live.”

Thomas de Maiziere claims the refugee camps are intended to provide refugees with a legal way to enter Europe so that traffickers and people smugglers in North Africa will be deprived of their exploitative business practices. This sham argument amounts to pure window dressing.

These measures amount to shredding what remains of

the right to asylum in the countries of the European Union (EU).

Internment camps in the African desert, which will offer only a few refugees the prospect of finding asylum in Europe, will not prevent people from taking the dangerous route across the Mediterranean in unseaworthy boats. “Screening” will be conducted in the camps themselves to provide only a hand-picked number of refugees with shelter in Europe. ProAsyl rightly points to the example of the Choucha camp in Tunisia, where the UNHCR operates a refugee compound with tens of thousands of refugees, from which only 195 have actually been permitted to travel to Germany.

Basic democratic rights are being undermined in the camps, since the ability to challenge asylum decisions in court is not guaranteed. Neither legal consultation nor legal representation is possible for the refugees. But even if their grounds for asylum were established, the refugees would never get to see Europe, because this would first require an EU member state to declare its willingness to accept them. Just how unlikely that would be is shown by the EU’s firm refusal to accept refugees from Syria.

Finally, the logistics of housing and providing for refugees in North Africa is left completely unclear. It is therefore easy to predict how the camps would look: heavily guarded and fenced with barbed wire, and with the material and medical support for refugees reduced to a minimum.

The EU does not shrink from cooperating with foreign governments to ride roughshod over human rights in its war on refugees, as was made clear by the “Khartoum Declaration” adopted by a conference of interior and foreign ministers of the EU and African Union (AU) in Rome in late November.

Representatives from a total of 58 states agreed to cooperate closely to bring forced migration to a halt in the countries of origin and transit countries far from the European borders. This amounts to nothing more than cooperation among police forces, cross-border exchange of information, deportation agreements and the joint construction and operation of “reception centres”. The five-page declaration offers not a single word about “legal ways” refugees might be able to enter Europe.

The EU has forced the African countries into closer cooperation in the campaign against refugees by undermining the right to asylum in exchange for the slight easing of visa or trade provisions.

Documents recently published in Algeria make clear exactly what this will entail. These show that the then-interior minister of the SPD-Green Party government, Otto Schily, had actually put his plans for internment camps in North Africa quietly and secretly into action at least in Algeria. As a result of German political pressure, some 56 small “reception centres” for refugees are said to have been secretly established there, some of which are still in operation. Facilities for the project were mainly existing ones used by the United States in its alleged fight against terrorism: secret prisons, torture equipment, and possibly even torture personnel.

The hermetic isolation of the European Union from refugees and its refusal to take in tens of thousands of asylum-seekers is an expression of its historical bankruptcy.

It recalls the time before the outbreak of the Second World War, when Leon Trotsky observed: “The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The issue of the admission of a hundred more refugees is becoming a big problem for a world power of the rank of the United States. In the era of the aircraft, telegraph, radio and television, traveling from country to country is being paralysed by the demand for passports and visas. The period of declining foreign trade and decaying domestic markets is also the period of the monstrous growth of chauvinism, particularly anti-Semitism.”

Given the incitement against refugees, migrants and Muslims from whatever source, attacks on refugees and their living quarters are constantly increasing in Germany. In addition to the everyday daubing of swastikas, refugee shelters are once again being

deliberately set on fire, most recently in Rostock and Bavarian Vorra.

Such acts are continually sanitized by de Maiziere’s ominous warnings that the hosting of refugees must not to lose sight of the level of “public acceptance”. Such arguments pave the way for the return of Nazi mobs.



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