

European Union plans more aggressive measures against refugees

Johannes Stern
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The European Union has long anticipated a rise in the number of refugees from North Africa and the Middle East seeking sanctuary in Europe.

“Our sources tell us that between 500,000 and one million migrants are willing to leave Libya,” said Fabrice Leggeri, the director of the infamous EU border agency Frontex, earlier this year. He added that the EU had to prepare for an even more “difficult situation” than in 2014, which saw some 278,000 “illegal border crossings,” over 150 percent the number in 2013 and about twice as many as in 2011.

To cope with the “difficult situation” and prevent “illegal border crossings,” the EU is seeking to scare off refugees by means of a deadly two-fold strategy:

First, the hermetic sealing off of the outer European border (some 12,000 kilometres on land and 45,000 at sea) with barbed wire, surveillance cameras, helicopters and drones, forcing refugees to take the most dangerous routes across the Mediterranean;

Second, with the halting of operation Mare Nostrum last autumn, the decision to allow refugees to die in the Mediterranean.

The main objective of the Mare Nostrum rescue operation begun by the Italian Navy after the Lampedusa disaster in 2013 was not the rescue of refugees, but the hunting down of smugglers and forcing back of refugee boats. Nevertheless, more than 100,000 refugees were rescued in the course of the operation, which was increasingly a thorn in the side for the European powers.

German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière declared that Mare Nostrum was an incentive to refugees, contributed to “trafficking,” and had to be stopped.

Now the EU is responding to the latest series of refugee disasters by doubling funding for “Operation

Triton” and increasing the number of vessels involved. The European Commission has proposed a doubling of the effort, de Maizière boasted following a meeting of the EU foreign and interior ministers in Luxemburg on Monday.

The most important task of Operation Triton is not rescuing refugees, but securing “Fortress Europe.” The doubling of resources is aimed at more effectively capturing and returning refugee boats.

Details of a ten-point plan that the EU Commission presented in Luxembourg suggest that the European powers are prepared to use military means against refugees in the future.

According to de Maizière, the Commission is examining how it can learn from its operations against pirates off the Somali coast. There were “considerations whether boats used by traffickers could be destroyed so they will not be used again,” *Spiegel Online* reported. Such a measure should be considered “very quickly, but carefully,” de Maizière said.

This means that the EU is thinking about deploying warships against refugee boats. Currently, two German frigates are active in the Horn of Africa under the EU’s Operation Atalanta.

At the same time, the European powers are preparing to exploit the mass deaths in the Mediterranean to intervene militarily once again in the geostrategically important and resource-rich region. Especially the German ruling elite, which abstained from the NATO war against Libya in 2011, sees a chance to secure its slice of the pie.

Speaking on the ARD programme “Report from Berlin,” Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier demanded that human traffickers be tackled on the ground. We need to “bring more stability to Libya” and “stop the trafficking organizations,” he said.

The chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Sigmar Gabriel, is speaking the same language. He has called for “all European police and border authorities” to take up “the fight against organized criminal gangs.” He recently declared, “We need an international operation against traffickers. And we have to help the countries—especially Libya—build stable structures and to cope with the influx of refugees.”

On Sunday afternoon, Italian Interior Minister Angelino Alfano called for support for a plan to begin an “international police operation” against traffickers on the Libyan coast and “on the beaches.” He appealed for a mandate from the United Nations and the EU to be carried out in cooperation with the Special Forces of different countries. This marks an escalation of Italy’s moves toward military action in its former colony Libya.

EU interior ministers are also discussing a plan to “deter” refugees by establishing refugee camps in African countries. According to a spokesman for the Italian Ministry of the Interior, Alfano proposed camps in Niger, Sudan and Tunisia.



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