

German chancellor feigns sympathy for refugees

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“Merkel has finally found the right words,” “Merkel’s words are encouraging,” and “Suddenly chancellor for refugees” read the headlines on the traditional summer press conference given Monday in Berlin by Chancellor Angela Merkel. The press was enraptured by Merkel’s references to “human dignity” and the “incredible suffering” of refugees, her description of the refugee problem as a “national task that affects everybody,” and her threat to confront violent xenophobes with “the full force of law.”

In fact, the policy of the German government has not changed. It continues to be characterised by a brutal disregard for refugees fleeing for their lives from the war zones in the Middle East and Africa.

For months, Merkel remained silent on the fate of refugees and the series of arson attacks on refugee shelters in Germany. As recently as mid-July, a video went viral showing Merkel in her typically bureaucratic manner reducing a Palestinian student to tears by telling her that she still faced deportation despite her excellent academic performance.

Merkel has adopted a different tone in recent days basically for two reasons.

First, she completely misjudged the mood of the population. Despite determined efforts, in particular by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Saxony and the Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria, the government has failed to incite xenophobic sentiments on a large scale. Refugees have been met with a wave of solidarity, which intensified after the recent series of arson attacks and neo-Nazi demonstrations in front of refugee centres. Many people instinctively realise that the refugees are victims of a policy that is also a threat to themselves.

Merkel’s cynical expressions of compassion are aimed at absorbing such sentiments. The pastor’s

daughter from East Germany is adept at such gestures. She owes her stunning political ascent not to any firmly held beliefs, but rather to her ability to detect and adapt to the prevailing trend—only to steer it in a reactionary direction.

Second, even if it sought to do so, the government could not immediately curb the influx of refugees. The Dublin Rule that for years kept asylum seekers away from Germany’s borders has virtually collapsed. The agreement, which came into force in 1997, stipulates that refugees must seek asylum and remain in the first European Union (EU) country they enter. The agreement has proved extremely beneficial for Germany, which has no external borders with the regions from which most of the refugees come.

The massive influx of refugees from Syria and other countries that have been ruined as a result of the military and political intervention of the Western powers has overwhelmed the Dublin agreement. Refugees are either prevented from crossing borders by means of brute state force, or handed on as soon as possible to the next country.

This begins on the Greek islands, where fugitives, having crossed the Aegean Sea, are housed under unspeakable conditions, and continues at the borders of Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary.

The Hungarian government has sealed off its border with Serbia with a fence and is considering the use of the military. The main railway station of Budapest was temporarily blocked and then cleared of refugees by the police. On Monday, thousands of desperate refugees were able to board packed trains before the station was cordoned off again. The trains were stopped again at the Austrian border, ostensibly for security reasons. Finally, Austria organised special trains to transport some of the refugees to Germany.

Previously, the Dublin Rule kept refugees out of Germany. Now, it is doing the opposite. There is no country to which the German government can pass on the refugees.

In addition, many EU countries, especially Greece, have been so impoverished by the austerity policies imposed by Berlin that many refugees have concluded that better opportunities await them in Germany. Merkel was cynical enough to cite this as proof that “the world sees Germany as a land of hope and opportunity.” She added, with a nod to Germany’s past, “This really was not always the case.”

If one looks at Merkel’s statements to the press more carefully, it becomes clear that she is trying to buy time. She wants to impose her conditions on the other EU member states to remove refugees to the fringes of the EU and—under the pretext of combatting the roots of the refugee problem—prepare new wars and military interventions in Africa and the Middle East.

She has insisted that other European countries, and eastern European countries in particular, take in more refugees. “Europe as a whole needs to move,” she declared. The EU as a whole would be damaged, she said, if Europe failed to address the refugee issue. She announced that, together with France, she will push for the rapid erection of registration centres in Greece and Italy.

In Brussels, EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, who works closely with Merkel, wrote a letter to all EU member governments threatening them with fines if they failed to comply with the Dublin procedure. On Thursday, Juncker will admonish Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán personally in Brussels.

In Germany itself, Merkel announced, the processing of asylum applications is to be accelerated, so that rejected applicants can be deported quickly. Refugees will be compelled to remain in prison camp-like reception centres until their applications are processed. Only in the event of acceptance will they be transferred to accommodation in the municipalities.

By September 24, the government plans to present a programme that will significantly lower the standards for accommodation of refugees under the pretext of reducing bureaucratic hurdles. For example, the regulations for fire and pollution control are to be watered down.

Merkel promised that the federal government would support the states and municipalities with “billions” to bear the costs of accommodation and management of refugees. She did not specify an exact amount. However, it is assumed that the sum will be well below the €5 billion Finance Minister Schäuble is due to rake in this year due to increased tax returns.

In the media, there is a growing chorus demanding that the refugee crisis be fought at its root—i.e., via military intervention in those countries already destroyed by previous Western military actions.

On Monday, Richard Herzinger thundered in *Die Welt* against the “conspiracy theory” that “with its aggressive intervention, especially in the Middle East, the West created the bloody chaos that has forced millions of people to flee.” He continued: “Not the intervention of the West, but its shameful retreat has detonated the region.... The current crisis reminds the West, and particularly Europe, to undertake not less, but more global interventionism.”



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