

Austria plans to close border as migrants surge across Europe

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The government of Austria announced on Sunday that it would close its border and resume controls blocking the travel of migrants from Hungary. Border restrictions had been temporarily lifted over the weekend, allowing thousands of refugees to travel on to Germany.

Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann announced the decision after a phone conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Merkel has made a show of accepting refugees, while Orban has stridently opposed any relaxation of travel restrictions.

The restrictions had been lifted after mass outrage followed the discovery of 71 refugees suffocated in the back of a truck on an Austrian highway and the appearance of horrific pictures of the body of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, who drowned in the Mediterranean.

Both Austria and Germany are seeking to quickly return to “normalcy,” i.e., restricted borders and onerous requirements. Closing the Austrian border also has the impact of cutting off the flow of refugees into its neighbor, Germany.

Faymann said, “We have always said this is an emergency situation in which we must act quickly and humanely...Now we have to move step-by-step away from emergency measure towards normality, in conformity with law and dignity.”

Eight thousand refugees arrived in train stations in Munich and Frankfurt on Saturday from Hungary or Austria, and approximately ten thousand yesterday. They battled police and authorities in Eastern European countries from Macedonia to Hungary in order to reach Germany, amid rising public anger across Europe at the state repression of refugees.

Pro-refugee protests took place in several cities in Turkey and France over the weekend, including Istanbul, Paris, Nantes, and Lyon, while refugees protested and

clashed with security forces in the Greek island of Lesbos. Refugees also organized protests in Milan.

The European powers are facing an escalating political crisis over the largest refugee disaster since the end of World War II. Nearly one percent of the world’s population consists of refugees, after wars provoked by the United States and its European allies have displaced tens of millions of people. Eleven million have left their homes in Syria (over half the country’s population), two million in Iraq (on top of over four million displaced by the 2003 US invasion), and two million in Ukraine.

Hundreds of thousands more have fled war-torn Libya, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as repressive regimes such as the NATO-controlled enclave of Kosovo in the Balkans, and Eritrea, Nigeria and the Congo in Africa.

There is growing popular support in Europe for the refugees, and escalating fear in the European ruling class that the migrant crisis will discredit their wars and trigger broad sympathy in a continent already bled white by widely hated European Union (EU) austerity measures.

An English teacher who fled from Homs, Syria with her husband, an engineer, and their three children to Lebanon, then to Turkey, and finally to Europe gave a harrowing interview describing their experience to the BBC.

“All the governments make this war on Syria, I don’t know why, but they have their hands in everything, even the war. And now they stop us and prevent us to go to their countries. So where do we go? Where do we go? We can’t stay in the war. The president there will kill us, and they will do something bad to my children, to my daughters. I can’t send them to any school. And the other countries stopped us and prevented us from going to their countries—even the Arab countries,” she said.

At a pro-refugee protest in Nantes, Kotombo, a French citizen born in Chad, said: “Everyone closes their eyes to the wars, the crises, and their causes. Europe sells weapons everywhere. Foreign transnational corporations

plunder Africa's natural resources. All of the sectors of the economy are controlled by Western corporations. Europe says it cannot provide shelter to all the world's tired, poor masses yearning to be free, but then she should also cease to sow misery in these countries."

While only a small fraction of the number of refugees are going to Europe, at least 350,000 people have sought to flee to Europe this year, after 219,000 last year. Thousands have drowned after the EU adopted the sinister, politically criminal policy of trying to discourage migrants from fleeing to Europe by cutting back on rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

The sight of hundreds of thousands of innocent people risking death to reach a better life has brought home the enormous human cost of NATO's wars and the callousness of the EU.

A poll for Germany's *Stern* magazine found that 76 percent of Germans supported granting asylum to all refugees fleeing countries facing ongoing wars. Moreover, 57 percent supported unconditional asylum to those fleeing political or religious persecution.

Amid this intense political crisis, reactionary governments across Europe are trying to avoid completely antagonizing public opinion by making some concessions to the migrants. Even the Pope has come out with proposals to house immigrants inside churches across Europe. The ruling elites are very concerned about the opposition to war and austerity in the working class.

As Austria's announcement of the quick reversal of these measures makes clear, the catastrophes driving millions to flee their homes across the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe will not be resolved except by mobilizing social anger in an independent political movement of the working class across Europe against imperialist war and capitalism. Despite the temporary concessions made by Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron, the policies of the major EU states will not resolve, but only intensify the refugee crisis.

Officials across Europe, including Cameron and French President François Hollande, are now considering responding to the refugee crisis by intensifying air strikes against cities held by the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq. This would only further accelerate the bloodshed and the outflow of refugees from the Middle East.

Moreover, as Europe faces accelerating austerity, economic collapse and the rise of anti-immigrant politicians, from Marine Le Pen's National Front (FN) to the UK Independence Party and the racist demagogue Thilo Sarrazin in Germany, the arrival of hundreds of

thousands of immigrants seeking work will provoke bitter social tensions in Europe.

No faction of the European bourgeoisie intends to grant migrants the basic democratic right to go where they please in order to escape wars and oppression. Instead, the EU powers are squabbling over a reactionary system of quotas, according to which European governments would decide among themselves which countries would accept how many immigrants. EU foreign ministers held an inconclusive meeting to discuss the issue on Saturday morning in Luxembourg.

Numerous Eastern European governments oppose a quota system on utterly reactionary grounds. The so-called Visegrad group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) formally stated its opposition to a quota system on Friday. Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán had previously denounced refugees as a threat to Europe's "Christian roots," while Slovak officials have indicated their opposition to granting asylum to all but Christian Syrians.

Nevertheless, as Eastern European officials also pointed out, migrants overwhelmingly want to go to Germany—which has far lower unemployment than the rest of Europe, and where they hope to obtain jobs and a future. The EU could thus attempt to impose these quotas only by a new resort to force against the migrants.

Inside the German and Austrian political establishments, the decision by German Chancellor Angela Merkel to temporarily allow Syrian refugees into Germany provoked opposition. Merkel came under fire from within her own government, from the Christian Social Union (CSU) of Bavaria, whose Andreas Scheuer declared: "It can't go on like this. Germany cannot afford this alone."

In an attempt to bridge some of the differences over the proposed quota system, one measure being considered is to allow countries to "opt out" of their quota of refugees by paying into a fund.



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