

German government tightens measures against refugees

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On Sunday evening, less than a week after German chancellor Angela Merkel was being celebrated as the “Refugees’ Chancellor” because of her apparent humanitarian attitude towards refugees, the three governing parties—the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD)—decided on drastic action to stem the tide of refugees.

The coalition summit was convened after about 20,000 refugees (mainly from Syria) arrived in Germany from Hungary at the weekend.

On Friday, as the situation in Hungary escalated and thousands of refugees started walking towards the Austrian border, Chancellor Merkel, Austrian chancellor Werner Faymann and Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban decided in night-time phone conferences that the refugees should be allowed to travel to Germany due to an emergency situation.

Merkel was clear that to use force to keep back the refugees would have led to a bloodbath and triggered a wave of outrage in Germany, where the trains arriving on Saturday and Sunday were welcomed by an army of volunteers.

Merkel’s decision was sharply criticised by the Bavarian CSU, which has three cabinet ministers in the federal government. The specially convened CSU party presidium described the decision unanimously on Saturday as “wrong”.

The coalition summit has now made it clear that this was a one-time exception. The Dublin Convention, which keeps refugees away from Germany by forcing the states at the external borders of the European Union (EU) to look after them, continues to apply to all EU member states, the chancellor stated after the meeting.

In addition, the coalition meeting took a number of decisions that will significantly worsen the situation for

refugees in Germany.

Following Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro are to be declared safe countries of origin as well. Refugees from these countries, many of them from the Roma minority which faces discrimination, will no longer have the right to make a claim for asylum and can be deported in the shortest possible time. The maximum duration for which deportations can be suspended, the result of another coalition decision, will be reduced from six to three months.

In the 2016 budget, the federal government plans the additional expenditure of €3 billion for dealing with the refugee and asylum situation, and will make a further €3 billion available to the federal states and municipalities. These sums will be used primarily to house the refugees in camps, effectively imprisoning them. For example, 150,000 winterised spaces are to be set up in the initial reception centres. To this end, building regulations and standards are to be suspended by a special law.

For asylum seekers in these facilities, cash payments as previously provided will be replaced by benefits in kind. The CSU, which regards the payment of a miserable “pocket money” as an “incentive” to come to Germany, has prevailed on this issue. This will make it even harder for asylum seekers to leave the reception centres, which are often situated in remote places and can only be reached by public transport.

The head of Pro Asyl, Günther Burkhardt, criticised this decision, saying, “Benefits in kind do not treat refugees humanely as demanded by the constitution”.

To guard the refugees and to speed up the asylum procedures and deportations, 3,000 additional posts for police officers will be created and new staff will be “unbureaucratically” hired for the Federal Office for

Migration and Refugees (BAMF), which decides on asylum applications.

The German government will also exert massive pressure on the other EU member states. Merkel spoke of the European Union “making an effort” to ensure a “fair distribution of refugees.” What this means is that other states will be forced to take a larger share of refugees and will have to pay fines if they do not.

The coalition is also calling for a common EU list of safe countries of origin and a uniform EU asylum law. For many refugees, mainly those from the poverty-stricken Balkans, this will make it nearly impossible to find accommodation and work in an EU country.

On Wednesday, EU Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker will present a package of measures from the Commission before the European parliament, which aligns in many respects with the requirements of the German government. It provides for the redistribution of 120,000 refugees to other countries on the basis of a binding distribution quota system, which will also automatically apply in future emergencies. Furthermore, the Commission intends to develop a Europe-wide list of “safe countries of origin”.

In addition, there are already existing plans to build large registration centres in the EU border countries of Greece and Italy, where refugees will be detained in what are effectively concentration camps, to be processed and then sent back again. Under the pretext of “combating the causes of flight” in Syria, Libya and Africa, there are also intense preparations to intervene militarily and thus exacerbate the wars that originally triggered the exodus.

On Monday, Merkel invited the Serbian prime minister, Aleksandar Vučić, to the Chancellery in a surprise visit. Serbia is the most important transit country for refugees who stream to Central Europe via Greece. Nothing was revealed about the content of the conversation. However, it is believed that Merkel promised Vučić more support for Serbia’s EU accession if the country makes additional efforts to prevent refugees from entering the EU.

The opposition parties in the Bundestag (parliament) have largely welcomed the decisions of the coalition committee. The Green Party chairman, Cem Özdemir, said, “There’s a lot here that is going in the right direction.” And the designated parliamentary leader of the Left Party, Dietmar Bartsch, praised the increase in

Federal Police posts and the financial provisions for the municipalities. What is basically correct is that the CDU and SPD are dealing with the causes of flight, he added.



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