

EU prepares plan to turn away masses of refugees from Europe

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10 September 2015

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the European Union (EU) address yesterday highlighted the political gulf separating popular sympathy for the refugees arriving in Europe from the vindictive policies of the ruling class. While polls in Germany show broad support for granting asylum to all refugees, and thousands are turning out to greet and give aid to those arriving in Germany and Austria, the EU is preparing to turn away masses of refugees.

Juncker unveiled a proposal to spend a miserly sum on a quota system, under which only a small fraction of the total number of refugees would remain in Europe. "Since the beginning of the year, nearly 500,000 people have made their way to Europe," Juncker said, mainly from Syria and Libya. Some 213,000 are in Greece, 145,000 in Hungary, and 115,000 in Italy.

Nevertheless, he proposed a quota system to take in only 160,000 refugees, less than one third of the total number, and forcibly distribute them between different EU countries—including towards countries where the refugees may not wish to go. The quota program would receive €780 million (US \$875 million) in EU budget support.

Juncker painted the picture of European authorities overcome by events that had escaped their control. He bleakly declared that "our European Union is not in a good state," predicting that the refugee crisis, like the wars in Syria and Libya, would continue indefinitely. "Let's be clear and honest with our often worried citizens: as long as there is a war in Syria and terror in Libya, the refugee crisis will not simply go away," he said, adding: "I do not want to create any illusions that the refugee crisis will be over any time soon. It will not."

Indeed, after French President François Hollande and

British Prime Minister David Cameron called for stepped-up air strikes in Syria this week, the EU powers seem to have no other plan beyond escalating the Syrian crisis even further.

Juncker also gave a disastrous account of the internal situation in Europe. "The economic and social situation speaks for itself: over 23 million people are still unemployed today in the European Union, with more than half without a job for a year or more. In the euro area alone, more than 17.5 million people are without a job. Our recovery is hampered by global uncertainties. Government debt in the EU has reached more than 88 percent of GDP on average, and stands at almost 93 percent in the euro area. The crisis is not over. It has just been put on pause," he said.

The content of Juncker's address constitutes an indictment of the social order. The wars for regime change the EU powers launched together with Washington in Libya and Syria, using reactionary Islamist militias as proxy forces, have devastated entire societies. As refugees now stream into Europe, the European ruling elite is refusing to assist them, bickering violently instead over how to divide up responsibility for greeting or expelling refugees.

Europe remains the world's wealthiest continent. Nonetheless, the EU plans to spend much less on the refugee crisis than far poorer Middle Eastern countries, which are spending billions of dollars on housing millions of refugees. Counting only Syrian refugees, 1,938,999 are staying in Turkey, 1,113,941 in Lebanon, 629,266 in Jordan, 249,463 in Iraq, and 132,375 in Egypt, according to UN statistics. Over seven million have been displaced within Syria itself.

The situation prompted a protest from Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in a column titled "Turkey cannot deal with the refugee crisis alone" in the British

Guardian. He wrote, “We have spent more than \$6 billion for Syrians, Iraqis, and other migrants in Turkey. The contribution we have received thus far from the international community stands at a fraction of this figure (\$417 million in total, out of which only \$165 million is from EU nations, including NGOs). The concept of burden-sharing has become a meaningless catchphrase.”

Even the inadequate and reactionary program proposed by Juncker faces opposition from all sides inside the EU, however. EU diplomats indicated they believed it was unlikely that the upcoming summit of EU interior ministers on Monday would arrive at final agreement on Juncker’s proposal. “I hope that the ministers of the interior will at least be able to agree to the main points,” Juncker told journalists after his address.

Great Britain, Denmark, and Ireland have already announced that they will opt out of Juncker’s plan. Leading officials of Eastern European countries including Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic have all opposed a quota system, with Hungarian premier Viktor Orban denouncing the refugees as a threat to Europe’s “Christian identity.”

Speaking before the British Parliament, Prime Minister David Cameron denounced Juncker’s quota plan for encouraging refugees to seek asylum. “If all the focus is on redistributing quotas of refugees around Europe, that won’t solve the problem, and it actually sends a message that it is a good idea to get on a boat and make that perilous journey,” he said.

The French government is supporting Juncker’s plan, apparently in an attempt to limit the number of refugees it would have to accept on its soil. On Monday, it proposed to take in 24,000 refugees this year, precisely the number now assigned to it under the quota system Juncker unveiled.

The day before, however, German Chancellor Angela Merkel had said that Juncker’s quota system was in fact only the “first step” in building a “new asylum policy” in which migrants would be distributed more evenly between EU countries.

Merkel made these remarks after meeting with Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, who attacked other EU countries for “shirking their responsibility” to take in refugees. “Sweden and Germany are the countries in the EU that take in the largest share of

refugees and advocate a common system of binding quotas, which all EU countries must follow,” Löfven said.

“There is another step that needs to be taken because neither Germany nor Sweden can determine the number of refugees, given that it stems from the situation on the ground,” Merkel said. She added that “we need an open system to share out those with a right to asylum.”

In the meantime, refugees continue to stream into Europe. There were clashes with Hungarian police Wednesday as refugees forced their way through the Serbian-Hungarian border. A TV camerawoman working for a nationalist station close to the far-right Jobbik party, NITV, was fired amid public outrage over footage of her kicking and tripping refugees as they clashed with police.

The Greek island of Lesbos, where 30,000 inhabitants now live side by side with 20,000 refugees, has begun to issue permits allowing refugees to travel on towards other EU countries.

Denmark suspended rail traffic with Germany yesterday, after police stopped hundreds of migrants seeking to reach either Sweden or Germany. Danish rail officials had instituted extraordinary passport checks after two trains carrying over 200 migrants were held in Rodby, a port with ferry links to Germany. Police said migrants refused to leave the trains to avoid being registered in Denmark.

The wealthy southwestern German region of Baden-Württemberg temporarily ceased accepting new refugees on Wednesday, stating that its reception centers were full. It plans to begin accepting refugees today, however, even though 20,000 people are now staying in its reception centers, compared to their technical capacity of 12,000.



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