

German interior minister plans abolition of right to asylum

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European Union interior ministers will meet today and heads of government tomorrow to adopt new measures directed against the influx of refugees.

Sharp conflicts emerged in recent days between various EU member states. Internal European borders were closed and refugees driven from one place to the next, only to be blocked by barbed wire and tear gas. Now the EU is preparing the virtual closure of its external borders. Such is the result of the political debate within Germany, where most refugees have arrived to date.

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière explained the motives behind his call for a uniform European regulatory system on asylum and firm refugee quotas for all EU member states. He made clear that he wants to establish a firm upper limit beyond which the right to asylum will no longer apply. Refugees would remain confined to camps in their regions of origin or returned to these regions by warships currently operating in the Mediterranean Sea to target smuggling boats.

“We can’t take in all refugees from crisis areas, and all economic migrants who want to come to Germany,” de Maizière said. “The correct way would be if we could commit within the EU to firm, generous quotas for the acceptance of refugees.” In this way, it would be ensured that “we accept only as many refugees as we can manage over the long term.”

Once the determined quota had been reached, victims of political persecution would be sent to “a secure location in Africa.” Refugees intercepted at sea would be “brought to a secure location outside of Europe, and not inside Europe.” Otherwise, de Maizière added, “there is no sense in a quota system as a solution.”

Responding to *Der Spiegel’s* objection that this violated Germany’s asylum law—which does not allow such numerical limits—de Maizière responded that the German government was pushing for a “unified European right to

asylum,” as part of which “we must give up a portion of German sovereignty.”

In short, in the name of uniform European regulation, the interior minister is proposing to abolish the right to asylum—a right anchored in Germany’s Basic Law and laid down in response to the crimes of the Nazis.

De Maizière is not restricting his agenda to abolishing the right to asylum. He is pushing for measures to severely deter refugees. Following the report by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* last week of a draft law prepared by the Interior Ministry that would restrict the rights of asylum applicants and the welfare benefits they receive, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* has reported a further draft agreed with other ministries that goes even further than the original proposal.

Along with the designation of Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia as “safe countries of origin,” a lengthening of time spent in prison-like reception camps from three to six months, and the transformation of pocket money into non-cash benefits, an accelerated asylum procedure on the borders is also planned.

“Obviously unjustified attempts at asylum” would be rejected in procedures lasting a maximum of three weeks. The federal office for migrants and refugees (BAMF) would have to make a decision on such cases within two weeks, and the legal process would be streamlined. To prevent refugees from traveling into the country in spite of this, the borders would be constantly checked and refugees imprisoned for the duration of the procedure.

The category of “obviously unjustified” asylum applications would include all so-called “Dublin cases.” This would apply to any refugee who had traveled through another European Union country to reach Germany, i.e., almost everyone who has recently arrived in Germany. According to the Dublin regulation, the state where refugees first enter European Union territory is obliged to register them, carry out the asylum procedure,

and, in some cases, accept them.

The Dublin regulation collapsed under the flood of refugees heading for Europe from countries devastated by imperialist wars waged by the US and Europe—Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, etc. It cannot be re-imposed overnight, but de Maizière brought it forward in order to put pressure on other countries. In the *Spiegel* interview, he insisted that “the Dublin system applies as long as there is no majority in Europe for other regulations.”

He also proposed a “European solution on the issue of entry, distribution and social standards.” Welfare benefits in Germany would not be based in the future on the cost of living there, but rather on the lower living costs prevailing in poorer European countries. De Maizière and other politicians have opposed guaranteeing refugees the minimum level of benefits required for subsistence as an “incentive” that attracts more migrants to Germany.

De Maizière has been criticised for his brutal stance on refugees. Confronted with a wave of sympathy from the population towards the refugees, the media is attempting to create the impression that there are substantial policy differences on the issue between him and Chancellor Angela Merkel. The cover of *Der Spiegel* carries a picture of Merkel as Mother Theresa, who, it is cynically claimed, has “come to her senses in the face of widespread warm-heartedness.”

In truth, the chancellor, her coalition partner, the Social Democrats (SPD), and the parliamentary opposition parties stand firmly behind de Maizière. “Whoever has really been listening,” remarked a *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commentator, would “recognise from the beginning that Merkel never said anything other than de Maizière.” She merely employed different terms.

Social Democratic Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel criticised de Maizière’s proposal to reject further asylum seekers after a quota had been reached. But he rebuffed calls from within the SPD for de Maizière’s resignation as “rubbish,” and whipped up anti-refugee sentiments himself. In an interview with the *Bild* newspaper, Gabriel said Germany could not offer a home for all refugees. “Those who come from countries where there is neither war nor persecution have to leave our country,” he demanded.

At a meeting with state premiers in the chancellor’s office on September 15, it was mainly SPD premiers such as North Rhine-Westphalia’s Hannelore Kraft and Hamburg’s Olaf Scholz who pressed, along with Bavaria’s Horst Seehofer of the Christian Social Union, for the accelerated deportation of rejected asylum seekers.

The SPDWelt politicians marked

“abandoned all political correctness.” Scholz called for the immediate halting of all welfare support on the day an asylum application was rejected. An unnamed SPD premier ranted that the “Balkanese” had to be deported. And Erwin Sellering (Mecklenburg-Pomerania) demanded that Merkel offer “no perspective for remaining” to refugees.

The same tone was struck by the Left Party. Already in July, Left Party Premier in Thuringia Bodo Ramelow told *Der Spiegel*, “Nowhere in the world is there unlimited capacity. And it is not an option to allow the stream of refugees to flow unrestricted.”

One month later, Left Party parliamentary fraction leader Gregor Gysi told ZDF television that the Left Party understood that “there is no room in Germany for the world’s people.” He also said that “open borders,” a demand in the party’s programme, did not mean that everyone could stay. Balkan refugees, in particular, were not being politically persecuted. “We have always said, we only accept people in emergencies,” he added.

Instead of uniting workers, the unemployed, poor and refugees against the government’s attacks, the SPD and the Left Party are attempting to play them off against each other, thereby playing into the hands of extreme right-wing forces. The wing of the Left Party around Oscar Lafontaine and Sahra Wagenknecht has been especially prominent in this respect.

Wagenknecht warned in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that the use of refugees as a downward pressure on wages had to be avoided. “These fears exist, and they are not unjustified,” she said.

Lafontaine called on the government to make sure that “migration is not misused to open a new round of wage dumping in Germany.” The newspaper *Junge Welt* (close to the Left Party) also recently denounced refugees as “wage dumpers.”



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