EU summit reinforces Fortress Europe

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A special summit of European Union heads of state on Wednesday evening adopted a series of measures to stop the flow of refugees into Europe.

One day earlier, a summit of interior ministers argued fiercely over the distribution of refugees throughout Europe. After the majority of interior ministers decided on the redistribution of 120,000 refugees, against opposition from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia, Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico declared his refusal to comply with the "diktat." Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban accused Germany of "moral imperialism."

As a countermove, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel called for sanctions against countries that refused to take in their quota of refugees. French President François Hollande even suggested opponents of the quota regulations withdraw from the EU.

On Wednesday, the heads of state were clearly trying to calm the waters. They did so at the expense of the refugees. The measures adopted were aimed at, first, not permitting refugees into Europe at all, then corralling those who did get through in camps near the borders and restricting their freedom of movement within Europe.

To prevent refugees from leaving the inhumane and overcrowded camps in Jordan, Lebanon and other neighboring countries of Syria, the EU will allocate one billion euros for the World Food Program and the United Nations' refugee agency. African countries are also to be supported financially for the purpose of detaining refugees.

All together, the funds appointed for refugee aid will be doubled, from 4.5 billion euros to 9.2 billion. The term "aid," however, is a fraud. A significant portion of the funds will go towards keeping refugees out.

In addition, the border protection agency Frontex is to be upgraded. The agency, established in 2004, was originally intended only to coordinate the protection of external borders of the EU between member states. It has since developed into an independent European border police force with a military infrastructure and its own surveillance apparatus.

Frontex is now not only responsible for the coordination of border protection, but also for risk and threat analysis at external borders, the training of border protection officials, supporting member states with its own personnel and technology, the deportation of refugees, as well as cooperation with Europol and the security agencies of non-member states. Frontex plays an important role in militarily sealing off the Mediterranean and the hunt for smugglers.

Now it will also play an important role in the registration and interrogation of refugees in so-called "hotspots." The heads of state acknowledged the completion of such border registration centers was of the highest priority. According to a summit decision, "hotspots" will be operational in Greece and Italy by the end of November at the latest. Bulgaria has already declared it will also construct such a center.

The "hotspots" have the task of detaining refugees who make it to Europe despite the closure of borders and hold them until their asylum applications have undergone an initial review. Because the Italian and Greek governments have not yet been able to fulfill these tasks, they are to be carried out under European administration—or, as it is officially known, with "additional help" from the EU. Equipment and personnel from other European member states are to be employed in the "hotspots."

In the long term, the task of the "hotspots" will be to turn back as many refugees as possible and allow only the few remaining to travel further into other European countries. Their numbers will correspond with voluntary quotas set out in advance. "The chaos at our external borders must come to an end," said European Council president Donald Tusk.

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In addition to more tightly sealed borders and the accelerated construction of “hotspots,” the heads of state agreed on a foreign policy offensive. They intend to intervene more strongly in the Syrian civil war and deepen their collaboration with Turkey and other governments in the region. Questions of human rights and other moral scruples, which would otherwise serve as a pretext for such interventions, will be disregarded.

“The defense of the external borders of Greece will not succeed without Turkey,” said German Chancellor Angela Merkel. On this point, she and the Hungarian Prime Minister Orban, whom Merkel had attacked harshly only shortly before, were in agreement. Summit participants instructed European Council president Tusk and EU Commission president Claude Juncker to start an initiative accordingly.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who faces tremendous political pressure at home and has reacted with the resumption of civil war against the Kurds and censorship of the press, stands to benefit from the diplomatic goodwill of the EU, coming as it does just before parliamentary elections in Turkey.

The foreign policy offensive in the Middle East goes far beyond the refugee issue. Above all, Germany sees a chance to play a larger role in a region of strategic importance, both as a market and as a source of raw materials.

Two years ago, German President Joachim Gauck declared that Germany must again play a role in world politics commensurate with its actual size and influence. In Ukraine, where Berlin, next to the US, played the leading role in the coup of February 2014, put this policy into practice.

It now finds its continuation in the Middle East. The German foreign ministry has long sought to pursue its own initiatives there, at times in direct opposition to the policies of the US and other NATO partners. That is why Berlin did not insist on the resignation of Bashar al-Assad as a precondition for negotiations. At the Brussels summit, Chancellor Merkel even spoke openly for discussions with Assad.

According to press reports, Russia’s stepped-up intervention in Syria has been seen in Berlin, in contrast to Washington, as positive. “Many in the government coalition are agreed that there is no solution to be found without Moscow,” wrote *Der Spiegel* in its latest edition. “Even Russia’s support for dictator Assad is seen by many as an opportunity rather than a problem.”

The German Institute for International and Security Affairs, a thinktank close to the government, proposed in a paper titled “A German Strategy for Syria,” arguing that Berlin participate in the bombing of the Islamic State (IS) and, following up its military aid to the Peshmerga of the Iraqi Kurds, provide the Syrian Kurds of the PYD with weapons.

The US-led wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, as well as the destabilization of Syria and the arming of Syrian jihadists through the NATO powers and their allies in the region, have created the present catastrophe and turned millions into refugees. Now, in the name of the “struggle against the causes of flight,” the next round of military interventions and wars are being prepared.

In the meantime, virtually all of the imperialist great powers and regional powers in the Middle East are pursuing their own interests with military means. The entire region resembles a seething cauldron which, like the Balkans prior to the First World War, could ignite a new worldwide conflagration.

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