# Hungary deploys army against refugees

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The parliament of Hungary passed a constitutional amendment Monday permitting the deployment of the country's army at the country's borders to repel refugees. With 151 votes in favor, including the votes of the ruling Fidesz party and the far-right Jobbik party, the bill received the two-thirds majority required for changes to the constitution.

The new law will allow the armed forces to stop people at the border and search vehicles. The army will also be allowed to use batons, rubber bullets and nets. The initial draft also allowed police to search homes without a court order if they suspected the presence of refugees. This provision was then deleted from the final text following a wave of protest.

Hungarian soldiers have already been mobilized on the country's border with Serbia to erect a high barbed wire fence. They are also permitted to reinforce police units at the border.

On Monday, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán defended closing the border in parliament: "Many say that fences are not a good solution, because everyone would have to build a fence. But that is precisely the solution," he declared.

He denounced the impoverished and desperate refugees as a threat to the EU: "They are overwhelming us. They are not just banging against the door; they are kicking it down." Hungary and the EU had to counter this "brutal threat."

The Orbán government has already built a 175-kilometer-long fence on Hungary's border with Serbia and is currently building similar fences on its borders with Romania and Croatia. On September 15, a law also came into force that made the illegal entry into Hungary a serious crime, punishable by three years in prison or deportation.

The mobilization of the military at the border, while targeting refugees, aims at annulling fundamental democratic rights for the entire population.

Civil rights activists have criticized the new laws. In an open letter, a group of lawyers complained that child refugees do not receive the protection entitled to underage persons by law. They pointed out that accused refugees cannot read the accusations and judgment made against them in their mother tongue, although this is required by law. Moreover, persons restrained in a camp under "house arrest" are not allowed to make phone calls or have personal conversation with a defense lawyer.

Apart from some superficial criticism there is general approval for the brutal refugee policy among Hungary's main political parties. The social democratic MSZP did not vote against the constitutional amendment, but merely abstained in the vote.

And despite their occasional criticism of Orbán, other European countries support Hungary's crackdown on refugees.

On Wednesday, the German Christian Social Union, the Bavarian party that shares power with Angela Merkel's CDU and the social democrats, welcomed Orbán as guest of honor at a party meeting in Banz. CSU leader Horst Seehofer assured "dear Viktor" of a "high level of agreement" and emphasized that "Orbán is indispensable for the correct solution of the problem."

The Latvian government has also demanded that the EU provide additional funds to build border fences. The country plans to close its border with Russia and Belarus and install monitoring systems along the newly-reinforced border.

Bulgaria plans to deploy around a thousand soldiers at its border with Turkey. According to Bulgarian news sources, about 660 refugees tried to cross from Turkey to Bulgaria a week ago. They were discovered by Bulgarian border guards and intercepted by the Turkish border police.

The government in Sofia has already sent thousands of additional police officers to its 260-kilometer-long border with Turkey, and built a 30-kilometer-long barbed wire fence, which is to be extended along the entire length of the border. A representative of the Ministry of Defence said a plan for joint patrols of army and police was already in force.

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Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said that the relocation of troops to the border was aimed at “spreading respect and contributing to the security of the local population.” It was impermissible for “tens of thousands to cross our border” without the government taking “elementary precautionary measures.”

Human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Pro Asyl criticized Bulgaria’s crackdown on refugees. Pro Asyl had already reported last Spring on numerous cases where refugees were violently forced back across the Turkish border. Such “pushbacks” violate international agreements such as the Geneva Convention on Refugees. In addition, Pro Asyl criticized the conditions in Bulgarian refugee camps as inadequate.

In Bulgaria, just 7,400 asylum seekers have been registered this year. Refugees have largely avoided Bulgaria as a transit country because of the terrible conditions and long delays in the country’s refugee camps.

Slovenia has also sealed off its border using the harshest of measures. Last week Slovenian police used tear gas against hundreds of refugees, including children, on its border with Croatia.

There have also been growing conflicts between Serbia and Croatia after Croatia closed its border. The result was kilometer-long traffic jams on Serbian highways. Prime Minister Aleksandar Vu?i? called the move a “brutal attack on Serbia and the Serbian economy” and issued Croatia an ultimatum to open its borders.

Additional conflicts have erupted between Hungary on the one side and Serbia and Croatia on the other, following the closure of border crossings and restrictions on the transit of refugees. The Serbian government went so far as to threaten Hungary with its army should Hungary continue to push back refugees to Serbia.

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