

German parliament prepares crackdown on refugees

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The new restrictions on the right to asylum debated in the German parliament Thursday will result in severe hardship for refugees. If the proposal passes, refugees will be kept in overflowing reception centers for up to six months instead of three months. Asylum applicants from so-called “safe countries of origin” will be confined in such camps until they are deported.

Social services are to be cut massively. Instead of 143 euros per month for their daily needs, refugees will only receive benefits in kind and vouchers. Refugees whose applications for asylum are rejected and are ordered to leave will have their benefits cut below the bare subsistence minimum—to what is “absolutely necessary.” They will only receive basic nourishment and lodging.

This cut is a flagrant violation of the constitutionally-mandated inviolability of human dignity. The federal constitutional court decided in a 2012 ruling that “considerations regarding migration policy” could “not justify any cut in service standards below the physical and socio-cultural subsistence minimum.”

In addition, three more countries in the Balkans—Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo—have been added to the list of “safe countries of origin,” which means that refugees from these countries can be denied asylum using an accelerated procedure. In addition, conditions for a suspension of the deportation order have been made more restrictive and the time period before deportations will be carried out has been greatly shortened.

Although this reactionary attack on the right to asylum has been sharply criticized by experts, it is due to be passed by parliament and the federal assembly by October 16, and to go into effect November 1.

The president of the Council on Migration, the social anthropologist Werner Schiffauer at the European

University Viadrina in Frankfurt-Oder concluded that the “government is simply continuing a policy based on deterrence and partition.”

According to Schiffauer the proposal “worsens...not only the situation of refugees, but is also smothering the readiness of many citizens to become active on behalf of those seeking protection.”

But this is exactly the desired effect. The debate in parliament was accompanied by a barrage of statistics and reports aimed at creating the impression that the flow of refugees is out of control. The newly appointed leader of the Federal Office of Migration and Refugees said Wednesday that, according to its estimates, about 290,000 refugees are not yet registered and the authorities did not currently know how many people would come, where they would be housed, how they would be distributed and how their requests would be processed. Stephan Mayer, spokesperson of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) fraction spoke of a “frightening loss of control.”

On Wednesday, Interior Minister de Maizière claimed 170,000 asylum applicants had come to Germany in September alone. *Die Welt* quoted government officials who spoke of 200,000 refugees. Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann gave the figure of 270,000 refugees without citing any evidence for this number.

Statistics are being thrown around in order to stoke fears and break down the solidarity and readiness of the German population to take in refugees. The obscure statistics have been accompanied by demagogic attacks on Muslim refugees. Sections of the government are encouraging a mood hostile to foreigners, employing racist arguments ever more openly.

In the parliamentary debate on the law attacking

asylum, Interior Minister de Maizière demanded from refugees the “recognition of the legal and value culture” in Germany, which also involves “not coming to blows.” This was a reference to the outbreaks of violence in refugee centers that are currently a focus of media attention.

Despite de Maizière’s efforts to blame these outbreaks of violence on the supposedly uncivilized character of the refugees, they are above all a result of the terrible conditions in which migrants are kept confined. Refugees seeking protection abroad are often already traumatized when they arrive, have to put up with intolerable hygienic conditions in mass lodgings, are forced to make do without any privacy and wait in long lines to receive food.

The legal and domestic policy spokesperson of the CDU fraction in parliament and Deputy CDU President Thomas Strobl threatened refugees from the West Balkans: “Do not sell your house and your car in order to pay for the boat ride and the smugglers. We will rapidly send you back again. you will quickly be back where you came from and will only be poorer.” He provoked Muslim refugees with the words, “the prophet does not make the laws for us, parliament makes them for us in Germany.”

The contradiction between the sentiments of the population and the xenophobic propaganda spouted by politicians and the media could not be any greater. While thousands of people have taken it upon themselves to look after the needs of refugees and organize solidarity demonstrations, the government, with the support of all the parties represented in parliament, has pressed for the biggest attack on the right to asylum since the infamous asylum compromise of 1992.

Before the draft of the legislation was debated in parliament, de Maizière had already put additional measures on the table that would definitively destroy the right to asylum that is anchored in the German Constitution. The government worked single-mindedly to make the borders impenetrable to refugees and to stop the “influx of refugees,” as de Maizière put it in a meeting of EU interior ministers last week.

De Maizière wants future asylum seekers to be processed by border protection authorities in “transit camps” at the national border. Asylum seekers whose applications are rejected as “obviously groundless”

would be deported immediately.

This procedure has already been practiced at German airports since 1993 and would now be extended to include national borders. “One can already hold someone at an airport now, and check whether his application is obviously groundless and send him back,” said de Maizière Wednesday on the program Inforadio on the station Radio Berlin Brandenburg.

De Maizière calimed it was necessary to implement the guidelines of the European Union on asylum procedures, which would enable EU member states to carry out similar restrictive measures on the border. However, border controls would have to be implemented to that end and the Schengen agreement would have to be scrapped in practice.

The managing director of ProAsyl, Günter Brukhardt, sharply criticized de Maizière’s actions. “This will make it so that the refugees are given short shrift at the national borders. It amounts to human rights-free zones at the national borders. Evidently, anything goes when it comes to closing borders, regardless of who comes.” The procedure currently active at airports uses extremely narrow deadlines and the refugees have no access to lawyers, he said.

Expanded to the national borders, the current flow of several thousand refugees every day would lead to the building of huge internment camps for refugees at the border stations, where they would be left at the mercy of border protection authorities without any legal protection.

This is the same barbaric procedure that the dictatorial right-wing nationalist government of Hungary has pursued since mid-September. A 60-meter wide strip of land on the Hungarian-Serbian border was declared a transit zone and refugees who tried to cross this zone were pursued by the police as illegal immigrants, taken into custody and deported.



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