

German grand coalition axes the right to asylum

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Germany's governing coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) announced Thursday that they had come to agreement on the creation of "transit zones" on Germany's borders to process and detain refugees.

The proposal, presented in an eight-page paper following a summit meeting Thursday, amounts to the abolition of the constitutionally guaranteed right to asylum for a great number of refugees. In addition, asylum seekers' right to family reunification and entitlement social security benefits are to be greatly reduced.

Prior to the meeting of Angela Merkel (CDU), Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) and Horst Seehofer (CSU), the party leaders had engaged for several days in tactical manoeuvring over questions about whether the newly-created camps for refugees should be called "transit zones" or "reception centres", whether they are to be set up right on the border or spread throughout the whole country, and what kind of force would be exerted to ensure refugees were prevented from leaving the camps.

The SPD euphemistically called "transit zones" what Horst Seehofer's CDU had denoted as "detention camps" and "mass internment compounds." But there were no differences within the coalition when it came to the general aim of government policy. Both the SPD and the CDU/CSU alliance will do everything possible to limit the further intake of refugees.

Except for the transit zones, the agreement now reached contains all the miserable proposals that the the leaders of the CDU and CSU had already agreed to between themselves last Sunday. Constitutional concerns had been raised especially in relation to the establishment of "transit zones". The currently

proposed "registration centres" will largely serve the same purpose: to rob refugees of their freedom of movement, exclude them from legal due process and deport them as soon as possible.

The plan is to establish as many as three to five registration centres, the first two located in Bamberg and Manching in Bavaria. There, special camps already in existence will be reserved for refugees from the Balkans.

Refugees from the so-called "safe countries of origin" of the western Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia) will be detained in the registration centres, together with asylum seekers who are subject to a ban on re-entry or have made a renewed application for asylum following the German authorities' rejection of their first appeal.

This will result in refugees being selected for asylum on the basis of ethnic and arbitrary bureaucratic criteria. Whoever falls through the cracks of this repressive bureaucracy and has to remain in the registration centres will be denied participation in a the standard asylum process. An expedited procedure, analogous to the one already observed at German airports, will instead be conducted with the aim of rejecting the asylum application and deporting the applicant.

Within seven days of its submission, an asylum application will be liable to rejection via notification in the form of a standardized letter. Subsequent legal procedures following appeals against a decision are to be fully processed after two more weeks in order for the deportation to be effected after a mere three weeks. Refugees will be granted access to a very limited extent of legal consultation and legal aid, if any at all. The whole asylum procedure becomes a pure farce, since the result—deportation—is preordained from the outset.

In order for the authorities to be able to keep the refugees in the registration centres, new arrivals will receive the benefits due to them under the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act only if they register in the camps and remain there. Moreover, their freedom of movement will be severely restricted due to tougher legislation regarding residential obligation. They will not be allowed to leave their allotted county or city, not even to meet relatives and friends, or visit distant lawyers or supporting organizations.

Breaches of the residence obligation will result in harsh penalties. First, social aid payments will be slashed to the bare subsistence level, and the application process will be discontinued. In case of repeated offenses, refugees will face immediate deportation—irrespective of whether this poses a threat to their physical safety.

The screws are to be tightened even on civil war refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, despite the fact that these countries will not be regarded as safe countries of origin. Entitlement to family reunification for so-called “subsidiary persons in need of protection” will be suspended for two years. This will affect refugees who fail to meet the stringent requirements for recognition as politically persecuted people or war refugees according to the stipulations of the Geneva Conventions, but whose deportation cannot be carried out, because they would otherwise face the death penalty, torture or serious risk to life and limb.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper reported on Friday that, although only relatively few refugees currently fall into this category, the government is now also planning to grant only subsidiary protection to civil war refugees from Syria. They will receive a residence permit for only one year and be denied the right to have their families join them in Germany.

If they still want to deliver their families to safety, they will have to make the costly and dangerous escape together with their elderly and often sick parents, their pregnant wives, their children and babies. In only the last two months, more than a hundred children have drowned in the Aegean sea trying to escape the war-torn Middle East. By abolishing legal entitlement to family reunification, the German government will be responsible for even more fatalities.

At the joint press conference of the three party heads,

SPD chairman Sigmar Gabriel emphasized that there had “never (been) any differences (of opinion)” among them, when it came to the goal of reducing the intake of refugees and effecting the uncompromising and rapid deportation of rejected asylum seekers.

The federal government is also planning to extend the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) mandate in Afghanistan in order to create “internal protection zones” there. These will then be used as justification for returning Afghan refugees to the devastated country. There was also unity in the decision to cooperate more closely with the authoritarian regime of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey in order to keep refugees from passing into Europe.

The level of inhumane rhetoric currently prevailing in government circles was underscored by the appearance of ex-Interior Minister Hans Peter Friedrich (CSU) in the “Anne Will” *ARD* television talk show. Friedrich praised the high security fence around the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa as a model for the entire extent of the European Union external border.

Friedrich had nothing to say about the many victims of the reinforced triple fences with their razor sharp, military barbed wiring. Refugees who dare to climb over the fences are mercilessly beaten up by the Guardia Civil and hired Moroccan thugs. At the beginning of February 2014, the Guardia Civil fired rubber bullets at a group of some 200 refugees trying to swim around the fortifications at the port of Ceuta. 15 of these refugees were killed.

Next to Friedrich sat SPD parliamentary leader Thomas Oppermann, who refused to contradict Friedrich’s proposal for transforming Europe into a giant cage. Instead he presented a “social democratic” model, whereby refugees would be interned at the external borders of the European Union.



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