

Syriza government in Greece backs EU attack on refugees

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10 November 2015

The Syriza-led Greek government's complete subordination to the dictates of the European Union (EU) has had catastrophic consequences for refugees arriving in the thousands via the Aegean Sea. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras unconditionally supports the EU's hard-line refugee-deterrence policy, as was clearly revealed during his recent visit to the EU refugee registration centre, or "hotspot," in Moria on the island of Lesbos.

When Tsipras, accompanied by European Parliament President Martin Schulz, arrived at the entrance to the "hotspot," a group of refugee aid workers demanded the opening of the security fence on the Greek-Turkish border along the Evros River so as to prevent further refugee deaths in the Aegean Sea. Tsipras categorically rejected their plea. Instead, he railed against "criminal people smugglers," whose business is flourishing only due to the closing of the land border.

He told those assembled that when he arrived on the island, he experienced first-hand how a rubber-tube raft overloaded with refugees who were almost frozen to death had washed up on the beach.

"We saw the condition in which a makeshift boat, packed full of refugees, arrived on the island," Tsipras said. "It really brought home to us that we were witnesses to a criminal act, perpetrated by people smuggler gangs who pile refugees into vessels that are not seaworthy boats, but only rough-and-ready, patched-together inflatable tubes."

Tsipras added, "What's happening in the Aegean Sea is a crime and it must be stopped."

The Syriza government could stop the dangerous sea crossings by opening the Greek-Turkish border fence that was built with EU aid in 2013, thus enabling refugees to take a safe path to the European Union. However, the Syriza government fears that the EU

would impose even harsher sanctions on Greece for opening the border and leave the country to manage hundreds of thousands of refugees by itself. Syriza thus continues to play the role of a border guard for whom good relations with the EU are more important than the lives of thousands of refugees.

Meanwhile, the Aegean continues to become a death zone for refugees. Despite stormy weather and high waves, as many as 5,000 refugees are arriving on the Greek Islands in unseaworthy dinghies every day. According to figures released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 619,401 refugees have already arrived there this year. In October alone, some 218,000 were stranded in Greece, more than in all of 2014.

But while the simple ferry crossing for EU citizens costs only about €30 and a safe sea route takes a mere hour, refugees have to pay €1,000 or more per person for the perilous crossing on wobbly rubber rafts.

More than 200 refugees have paid with their lives for the EU's partition policy in the Aegean. When pictures of drowned three-year-old Aylan Kurdi lying on a Turkish beach stirred outrage worldwide two months ago, EU governments vowed that such a tragedy would not happen again. But since then, more than a hundred children have drowned in the waters between Turkey and Greece. Land for graves is becoming scarce for the corpses washed up on the island of Lesbos.

Aid organisations report that the refugee trek is continuing unabated despite the onset of winter. The only difference is that an increasing number of people are landing on Greek beaches in a state of hypothermia. Children arrive "dripping wet, shivering and with blue hands and lips," according to the Save the Children organisation.

If the refugees survive the trauma of the crossing, a

new horror begins in the scarce and deplorably under-supplied reception centres on the Greek islands. The European Union is currently concentrating entirely on selecting refugees from those already in Greece. Refugees are to be identified, registered and screened in five EU registration centres planned for construction in Greece. Those who are accepted as refugees in the fast-track procedure will then be distributed among other EU countries without having any say the country to which they are sent.

But the EU's plans mean that Greece will become the end of the line for the majority of the refugees, with disastrous humanitarian consequences. Refugees who cannot be deported will have to endure months of detention in camps that are grievously deficient in resources and plagued by unhygienic conditions.

A report by the ProAsyl refugee aid organisation describes the appalling situation in the camp outside the EU hotspot at Moria. The report declares the registration centre a "place of shame."

Mubarak Shah, a ProAsyl worker in Greece, described the situation on the ground: "Refugees in Moria are beaten, insulted and attacked with tear gas. They are destroyed psychologically."

Instead of providing for the distribution of refugees, the hotspot is used to detain them and accelerate their deportation. Up to 30,000 refugees are kept in these makeshift camps on the island. Due to a ferry workers' strike, some 15,000 registered but totally unaided refugees are marooned in the port of Mytilene.

Refugees must also wait for days to be registered, if they are lucky enough to be registered at all. Even though 5,000 new refugees arrive each day, only 2,500 people are registered each day, so the queue is getting longer. To make matters worse, the regulations are subject to random changes almost daily. No preferential treatment is granted to pregnant women, children, the elderly or the sick. Several women have already suffered miscarriages while waiting, because they received no aid.

Instead, the riot police stationed there continue their merciless maltreatment of refugees, beating them with batons, firing tear gas grenades and cursing them as "animals."

In the camp itself there is no food, no dry clothes and not even clean drinking water. To warm themselves, the refugees have to make fires in which they burn plastic

due to lack of firewood. More and more refugees are becoming ill each day. Children, in particular, suffer from high fever and bronchitis. Apart from the services of a few voluntarily employed doctors, no medical care is available.

A volunteer told ProAsyl that the ground had been turned into a muddy waste by the continuous rain. She said she had had to "attend to half-dead, rain-soaked babies from the queues at Moria the whole day," adding, "Infants were soaked to the bone and screaming from cold and hunger."

Conditions are even worse for unaccompanied refugee minors who are detained by the Greek authorities, ostensibly "for their protection." The security forces go so far as to separate children from their uncles and aunts because such family relations are not counted as next of kin.

The "protective custody" lasts an average of 14 days, during which many children and young people are so traumatised that they inflict serious injuries on themselves, or prefer to be returned to Syria rather than face the continuing horror of the Greek detention centres. A boy detained at Moria told ProAsyl: "Today the police threw us food over the fence instead of handing it to us. As though we were animals. We are given food, but never enough."

The pseudo-left Syriza government, which styles itself as an alternative to the neo-liberal capitalism of the EU, is completely responsible for this inhumane, barbaric treatment of extremely vulnerable people. It acts as a willing henchman to impose the brutal policies of the European Union.



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