

EU Council president wants to seal off Europe from refugees

Martin Kreickenbaum
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European Council President Donald Tusk called for interning refugees for 18 months after their arrival and sealing off Europe's borders, in an interview with six leading European newspapers including the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the British *Guardian*.

This comes as Turkish authorities detain thousands of refugees, who face deportation back to war zones, after they signed a November 29 deal with the European Union (EU).

The EU also threatened to expel Greece from the Schengen system of open European borders amid clashes between police and refugees at the Greek-Macedonian border. The situation continues to escalate at the Idomeni border crossing there. Most recently, Macedonian police used rubber bullets to shoot refugees who tried to cross the border after being denied entry.

Tusk justified demands for the long-term internment of refugees with distortions and lies. He denounced refugees as security risks and potential terrorists, citing the Paris attacks. In fact, the perpetrators of the November 13 attacks in Paris were almost all born in France and Belgium and grew up there as well. Several were under strict observation by police and intelligence agencies.

“Do not downplay the security question,” he said. “If you want to check migrants and refugees, you need more than a minute. It is not enough to take their fingerprints. It is no accident that international law and European rules call for 18 months.”

Even though Tusk knows better, he said most refugees only pretend to be Syrians, but actually have no grounds for seeking refugee status. He attacked claims that “we must be open for Syrian refugees. But they only make up 30 percent of the flow. Seventy percent are migrants. For this reason as well, we need

more effective controls.”

It is politically criminal to denounce desperate refugees as swindlers in order to stir up right-wing prejudices. Actually, according to International Organization for Migration (IOM) figures, 388,000 of the 608,000 refugees who traveled from Turkey to Greece between January and the end of October are Syrians. That is nearly two-thirds. 3,563 refugees have met their deaths in the Mediterranean this year, according to official statistics.

A quarter of all refugees arriving from the Greek islands in this period were children. Last week, 12 children drowned in the Aegean Sea. In October, 90 children drowned while crossing.

Tusk is considering a vast system of internment camps, run collectively by the EU, on its external borders where masses of people could be detained for long periods of time. According to Tusk, “We must help the frontline countries, not only by distributing [the refugees among them], but above all to carry out this procedure.”

By making such demands, Tusk is speaking for all the European governments and the entire ruling class. In Hungary and the Czech Republic, refugees were imprisoned on charges of “illegal entry.”

German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière has pleaded for months for expanding registration centers for refugees on the EU's external borders, so-called hot spots, into what would be concentration camps in all but name.

Tusk also attacked German Chancellor Angela Merkel. He criticized her joint decision with her Austrian counterpart, Werner Faymann, to allow refugees to enter Germany and Austria from Hungary at the beginning of September. Afterwards, thousands of refugees arrived in Austria and Germany on foot.

Merkel and Faymann allowed them entry, fearing that forcible rejection would provoke popular opposition and destabilize the entire Balkan region.

Now, Tusk said, “We can at least expect a changed attitude from the political leaders. Some of them say that the wave of refugees is too great to be stopped. This is dangerous. ... I am absolutely convinced that we must say: This wave of refugees is too big not to be stopped. This is a task we must undertake together.”

Forcibly stopping refugees would involve massive violence. Seeking to justify this inhumane policy, Tusk declared, “The current debate is not taking place between politicians or intellectuals or commentators. We must be aware that for the first time in many, many years, this debate is taking place in public, where sincere fear and insecurity dominate. One can sense this fear, this mood, on the street. ... No one in Europe is ready to take in these large numbers, including Germany.”

Actually, the fears Tusk is talking about have been systematically fanned by right-wing politicians for months, without great success.

Tusk, born in 1957, belongs to the narrow layer of social climbers who enriched themselves by looting state property and exploiting the working class after the restoration of capitalism in Poland. In 1989, he founded the Liberal Democratic Congress, which backed the free-market government of Hanna Sochocka and, after merging with the Freedom Union (UW) in 1997, joined the right-wing government of Jerzy Buzek. He was among the most aggressive supporters of the “shock therapy” that rapidly destroyed the nationalized property relations and social rights of workers in Poland.

Public sentiment is quite different from Tusk’s depiction. Despite hate campaigns against refugees, solidarity and eagerness to help prevail in the population. Refugees are cared for and advised by volunteers. Without donations from ordinary people—even in impoverished countries like the Czech Republic, Greece or Serbia—thousands of refugees would probably have died of hunger or frozen to death, as state authorities frequently fail to provide necessary aid.

Tusk praised Turkish authorities, who are now attacking the refugees. On Sunday, 250 border police and coast guard deployed to prevent refugees from

traveling from the coastal province of Canakkale. Over 1,300 refugees were taken into custody and brought to a deportation camp. In Ezine, authorities arrested 113 refugees and removed 57 more from a dinghy. Human rights groups fear they will be detained in camps and deported to Syria, Iraq, Pakistan or Afghanistan.

On the Greek-Macedonian border, according to ProAsyl, nearly 6,000 refugees who were denied entry into Macedonia are stranded in a provisional camp near Idomeni. The refugees, who mostly have to sleep in the open air, lack adequate food, blankets and warm clothing despite volunteer helpers’ efforts. When hundreds of them tried to go around the fence at the border crossing on Wednesday, many were injured by rubber bullets shot by Macedonian police.

The EU recently threatened to exclude Greece from the Schengen area if Athens did not take the refugee crisis in hand. The EU reportedly demanded that it agree to the stationing of 400 Frontex border protection forces on the Greek-Macedonian border and cease refusing the receipt of Eurodac devices that fingerprint refugees and save the data in a European file.

Athens’ refusal to carry out these measures is not motivated by “more humane” policies. Rather, it fears that Greece will be left to deal with the refugees on its own. Surveillance of the Macedonian border is supposed to prevent uncontrolled exit of refugees from Greece. Due to the strict registration process, other EU countries could cite the Dublin Agreement to return refugees to the country where they were registered—i.e., to Greece.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ government therefore is concerned that other EU states will dispose of refugees by following European rules and deport them to Greece, which has been already been devastated by the draconian austerity measures in Brussels and Berlin.



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