

# Syriza government carries out mass deportation of refugees from Greece to Turkey

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4 April 2016

Protests continued in Greece over the weekend as the Syriza government finalised the mass deportation of Syrian refugees to Turkey, where they are to be herded into concentration camps.

The refugees are being deported from Greece to Turkey as part of the recent European Union/Greece/Turkey deal to hermetically seal off the “Balkan route” to desperate refugees fleeing the war zones of Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and North Africa.

The thousands of refugees and asylum seekers are set to be shipped out on eight boats commissioned by the EU border agency, Frontex. Greek government figures showed that 52,147 refugees and migrants were stranded in the country on the weekend, with 6,129 registered on Aegean islands. Those sent to Turkey can expect even more brutality, with Syrians set to be shifted to refugee camps or other undefined areas within Turkey.

On Friday, the Greek parliament voted in support of the EU deal, allowing the first deportations to proceed today. At least 750 migrants are set to be deported between Monday and Wednesday from the island of Lesbos to the Turkish port of Dikili.

The bill, allowing the deportation of every refugee and migrant who arrived in Greece after March 20, was passed by 169 deputies in the 300-seat parliament. All those who arrived after that date have been rounded up and sent to dedicated detention centres on five Aegean islands—Samos, Chios, Lesbos, Kos and Leros.

Just two deputies of the pseudo-left Syriza party, which heads a coalition with the xenophobic Independent Greeks, voted against the deal. The legislation was passed with the support of the social-democratic PASOK and the right-wing populists, The

River. It contains fundamental attacks on democratic rights, including allowing an appeal process of just 15 days in the case of an asylum claim being dismissed.

On Friday, around 800 refugees being held on the Greek Aegean Sea island of Chios, fearing their forced deportation, broke through the razor wire fence surrounding the Vial detention camp. More than 1,440 people were being held at the former recycling plant, which is meant to hold a maximum of 1,100.

As hundreds streamed out of the camp, riot police attacked with stun guns and teargas. The refugees proceeded to the town’s port in order to protest their intolerable situation. There have been regular dinnertime protests against the EU agreement by the mainly Afghan refugees in Vial, who have virtually no chance of being granted asylum in Europe.

Earlier in the week around 700 refugees held at the Piraeus port demonstrated in the centre of Athens, with other protesters, in opposition to their captivity in Greece and against “Fortress Europe”.

The deportations have been condemned by United Nations (UN) relief officials and human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, who describe the plan as illegal and inhumane. All forced returns to Syria are illegal under Turkish, EU and international law.

The UN refugee agency said Friday that it doubted that Greece and Turkey were legally capable of carrying out the mass deportations of those being held in camps. It made a mealy-mouthed appeal for both countries to offer further protections for asylum seekers before undertaking deportations.

Amnesty International, in a report issued Friday, documented proof that Turkey was not a safe country

for refugees. The report, entitled “Illegal mass returns of Syrian refugees expose fatal flaws in EU-Turkey deal,” reveals how Turkey recently sent hundreds of Syrian asylum seekers back to their devastated homeland, contravening basic human rights procedures. It reports that Turkish authorities have been “rounding up and expelling groups of around 100 Syrian men, women and children to Syria on a near-daily basis since mid-January.”

The *New York Times* noted, “Among the cases the group [Amnesty] claimed to have documented was that of three young children forced back to Syria without their parents.”

Groups including Doctors Without Borders, the United Nations refugee agency and the International Rescue Committee recently suspended some of their operations at detention centres on the five islands and elsewhere in Greece to protest on-going violations of international law. These include the squalid camp containing more than 12,000 refugees at the northern Greek border town of Idomeni and at Piraeus, near Athens, where nearly 6,000 refugees are being held in more than a thousand tents and warehouses.

The brutal deportation operation is being carried out under instructions from the EU, even as its largest member states—Germany, France and the UK, proclaim their “humanitarian” motives for waging war in Syria. And they want the crime done with as little expense to themselves as possible. Syriza’s migration spokesman, Giorgos Kyritsis, complained that of 2,300 officials the EU has promised to send Greece to assist in the operation, only 200 have arrived so far. Aid parcels have not been forthcoming and, Kyritsis told the *Observer* on Sunday, “We are still waiting for the legal experts and translators they said they would send.”

On Sunday, *Kathemerini* reported that the first refugees were set to arrive in the western Turkish coastal town of Dikili, which lies just opposite the Greek island of Lesbos. Interior Minister Efkan Ala said, “We have prepared for 500 people to come on Monday.”

*Kathemerini* reported, “Ala indicated that citizens of countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan sent back by Greece would be returned by Turkey to their home countries.”

A report by the Agence France-Presse Saturday revealed that the Turkish authorities had still not

completed plans to process the refugees and asylum seekers due to arrive. They will be processed in a camp in a “500 square-metre area by the Ulusoy harbour in Cesme” in Izmir province. “Pictures broadcast by NTV television Friday showed only a barren space at the site of the proposed Dikili centre,” AFP notes.

According to Turkish daily *Milliyet* Saturday, the Dikili centre was not finished and registrations of refugees from Monday would take part in indoor sports arenas in the town.

AFP continued, “Turkish media reports meanwhile have said the Turkish Red Crescent is preparing to open a new refugee camp with capacity for 5,000 people further inland in Manisa in western Turkey—its first outside the south and east of the country—to accommodate the new influx.”

The Syriza government, currently imposing savage levels of austerity, is once again acting as a willing accomplice of the EU in its attempt to seal Europe’s borders to refugees fleeing war and violence. Kyritsis told the *Guardian*, ahead of the despicable operation, “We are expecting violence. People in despair tend to be violent.”

Last week, a Greek government source told AFP that around 400 Frontex police officers would participate in the first deportation operations.

Many refugees from various war-torn areas continue to make the hazardous trip across the Aegean from Turkey to Greece. Figures from the International Organization for Migration found that 151,104 had made the trip already this year, with 366 drowning in the attempt. Under the EU deal, those now attempting the journey are being ruthlessly turned back. On Saturday, the Turkish coast guard intercepted more than 60 migrants and refugees in the Aegean as they tried to reach Lesbos. The group, which included Syrians, were immediately transported to Dikili.



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