Austria rejects all refugees

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The Austrian government has announced it will turn away refugees at the border after conducting summary hearings. A determination will be made as quickly as possible on whether they can be deported to third countries. In this way, the grand coalition of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and Social Democrats (SPÖ) under Chancellor Werner Feymann is attempting to permanently reduce the number of refugees coming into the country, the DPA news agency reported.

Beginning in mid-May, all asylum applications will be decided at the border within an hour, including the possibility of an appeal. The only reason allowed for granting a residency permit will be the presence of close family members in Austria. This could be "determined within a few minutes through the registration system," a senior interior ministry official said. All other refugees would be rejected on the basis that they came from "safe third countries" into the Schengen zone, which surrounds Austria.

At the beginning of the year, the government in Vienna introduced a cap on asylum seekers. But now, a legal report has established that "a strict limit based on numbers" could possibly "be difficult under international law," as defence minister Hans Peter Doscozil admitted in Vienna last Wednesday.

The upper limit was to have been 37,500 people per year. In addition, Austria decided to implement a daily limit of 80 asylum applications at its southern border. According to the interior ministry, 15,000 applications have already been filed. A radical policy of deportations and the sealing off of the border will prevent refugees from entering. The military will be permanently deployed to enforce the policy.

Notorious right-wing interior minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner (ÖVP) announced a strengthening of border controls. "There is no reason for complacency", he said, warning that after the closure of the Balkan route, refugees would try to reach Austria through Italy.

At the initiative of Defence Minister Doscozil, soldiers will take over securing the Austrian border, above all on the Brenner-Pass, the main traffic route from Italy to Austria. After a meeting of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC), Doscozil declared that cooperation with the military in the refugee crisis was the supreme goal. The conference brought together defence ministers from Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro.

Doscozil also announced plans to send Austrian soldiers to the European Union's external borders, e.g. Greece or Bulgaria. He was thereby explicitly supporting the brutal treatment of refugees by Macedonia, which has utilised tear gas and water cannon to prevent women and children from crossing the border. "A state like Macedonia cannot be left isolated a second time", the defence minister stated.

Doscozil told Bavarian state radio (BR): "We notice that there is a significant development of the Mediterranean Sea/Italy/Brenner route. We have to focus on this, we have to pool our forces and expand them if the situation requires it."

After the closure of the Balkan route, so-called alternative routes should not emerge under any circumstances, through which refugees could reach the EU, he said. To achieve this, the EU border protection agency Frontex should be supported by soldiers and the police.

Austria, together with the Eastern European states, is taking the most brutal measures against refugees. Even the small number living in Austria are subject to attacks and the deterioration of their living conditions so as to persuade them to leave. According to the plan of the ÖVP-Freedom Party state government in Upper Austria, asylum seekers will receive just €520 instead of €914 for basic necessities.

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The hardline stance towards refugees is shared by the Greens and trade unions in Austria. Within the Greens, a leadership crisis has developed. A number of parliamentary deputies have, according to the *Kronen Zeitung*, called for a "palace coup" against party leader Eva Glawischnig. Glawischnig is considered a supporter of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's policy. On the issue of refugees, she has demanded a "European solution."

The trade unions, which are closely tied to the SPÖ, also support the government's line. Presidential candidate and long-standing chairman of the Austrian trade union association Rudolf Hundstorfer has repeatedly stated that he backs the government's approach, according to which the upper limit of 37,500 refugees is the biggest contribution to the refugee crisis that Austria can afford.

This policy is strengthening the far right. Based on the latest monthly poll by research firm Unique Research, the ultra-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) would come in first place in elections to the national parliament. According to this survey, the FPÖ would obtain 32 percent of the vote, the ÖVP 24 percent, and the SPÖ would come in third with 22 percent.

FPÖ candidate for federal president Norbert Hofer began his campaign on Saturday in the Upper Styrian town of Kapfenberg. Together with FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache, he agitated against the "asylum chaos." He called upon the government to stop the "invasion of Muslims." Strache blamed the Muslims' "crusade" for the attacks in Paris and Brussels. There could only be one upper limit for refugees, according to Strache, "zero."

He praised Hungary's Prime Minister Victor Orban for his brutal anti-refugee policies. Hungary showed the way forward. "Thanks to Orban," Strache proclaimed, adding, "That's what I would do as a future Chancellor, but first comes President Hofer."

The FPÖ has been organising rallies and protests against refugee accommodation throughout Austria. The result has been 25 attacks against refugee centres across the country over the past year. This figure was provided by the interior ministry in response to a question tabled by Green deputy Albert Steinhauser.

Facilities were affected in all states apart from Burgenland. Attacks were particularly high in Carinthia. The most serious incident occurred in Lower Austria, which along with Vorarlberg reported five attacks. Refugees were shot at with an air gun in Wiener Neustadt. At institutions in Hohenems and Wolfurt in Vorarlberg, Nazi propaganda was distributed.

It is significant that, according to the reports, the perpetrators were not investigated in the majority of cases. There have already been several attacks on facilities this year.

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