

German deportations rise sharply in the first half of 2016

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While the German government is actively involved in the escalation of tensions and wars in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, driving more and more people to take flight, it is simultaneously determined to deal brutally with those refugees that arrive in Germany. In this, it is supported by the opposition Left Party and the Greens.

In the first six months of 2016, the pace of deportations has massively increased nationwide. Up to the end of June this year, 13,743 people were deported, most of them to the Western Balkans. This is considerably more than last year. In the whole of 2015, some 20 thousand deportations took place—twice as many as 2014. This was revealed by the government in response to a question tabled in the Bundestag (parliament) by the Left Party.

In parallel with the deportations, more than 14,000 people have been refused entry into Germany in the first half of 2016. They were turned away either at the border or an airport because they were unable to provide valid papers or because they were unable to apply for asylum. This means 50 percent more people have been already been turned away this year compared to the whole of 2015. Refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Nigeria and Iraq are often denied entry.

In addition, from January to June 2016, over 30,000 asylum seekers left the country “voluntarily”, a third of them to Albania and several thousand to Iraq and Afghanistan. Such “voluntary” departures are usually the result of strong pressure from the authorities.

For example, just last Monday a group of Roma families with small children and a six-month old baby were expelled from the rectory in Regensburg, where they had found a few weeks’ protection. They are being forced leave for Kosovo, Serbia or Macedonia. The refugee agency had wanted to deport them at the beginning of the year. Recently, the diocese of

Regensburg had refused to grant them sanctuary, and had even blocked their food supply. Despite such coercion, their exit is likely to be considered “voluntary”.

In total, almost 50,000 refugees have been expelled from Germany in the first six months of this year—more than 400 people every day. Nevertheless, the government is not satisfied with this pace of deportations and wants to massively accelerate it.

Half a million asylum applications are to be processed by the end of the year, which corresponds almost exactly to the number of people that were registered as refugees over the last period. They have all provided their identity papers and fingerprints, photos and personal data in the central computer system and are now waiting in one of the many refugee shelters for a date for their asylum applications to be examined by the Federal Office for Refugees (BAMF).

The operational director of BAMF, Katja Wilken-Klein intends to decide upon the asylum applications of all these people by the end of the year. When asked on the *Morgenmagazin* news programme on August 2, “Why is this suddenly happening so quickly?” Mrs. Wilken-Klein responded, “We have set priorities.” The newly-established BAMF assessment centres could rapidly decide on up to fifty percent of the cases “very quickly”, she said.

The refugee organization Pro Asyl correctly fears that the right to asylum is being effectively undermined in this way. Its spokesman Bernd Mesovic, in a guest contribution in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* wrote, “the pace has been unceremoniously speeded up to enable a large number of decisions to be sent out, regardless of quality”. In “dry, boilerplate” terms, the authorities spell out why an asylum application is “manifestly unfounded”. Not infrequently, “duplicate decisions are

sent to one and the same asylum seeker—one saying this, the other that, one granting protection status, the other a rejection”. According to Mesovic, BAMF wants to “work through the delays—at almost any price.”

In this way, a majority of the new arrivals from the Western Balkan countries have had their applications rejected, and many of them have been deported. In the first half of 2016, three-quarters of deportations were people from the Balkans. Last autumn, the German government coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats declared the last Western Balkans states Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro to be “safe countries of origin”. And since the Maghreb countries, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria have also been defined as safe countries at the beginning of the year, more and more people are being deported to North Africa.

Refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan are also affected. The German government wants to establish “safe areas of origin” as quickly as possible in Afghanistan, although fighting there continues to flare up. As if this was not enough, the government is also working towards declaring sub-regions even in Syria as “safe”.

This is a clear violation of the Geneva Convention. For 65 years, the 1951 Convention has formed the basis of international rights for refugees and asylum. It prohibits the refoulement or deportation of people who are exposed to the risk of injury or death in their home states, and explicitly states that no one who seeks protection and asylum should be sanctioned for illegal border transgressions.

The virtual abolition of refugee protection is being supported and driven through, not only by the government, but also by the two opposition parties. The Green Party-run state executive in Baden-Württemberg ranks number three nationally for deportations since the start of the year.

Party representatives repeatedly call for a tightening up of deportation practice. For example, the Green Party mayor of Tübingen, Boris Palmer, recently demanded that offenders be deported, even to countries where there was a war taking place. “Because Syrians can no longer be sent back to their countries of arrival, there is only one way—send them back to the country of origin,” he said. One must check whether there are safe areas there, he said.

The Left Party is also actively pushing forward

deportation policy in the states it leads. In Thuringia, where Bodo Ramelow heads a Left Party administration, particularly brutal deportations take place. The budget for such deportations was increased sixfold in the state in 2015, from 750,000 euros to 4.9 million euros in 2016.

This has already led to a significant increase in deportations. According to the State Administration Office in Weimar, 339 asylum seekers were deported from January to mid-July—almost as many as in the entire previous year. In addition, there were 1,411 “voluntary” departures, which have increased even more sharply.

Ramelow is fuelling the machinery of deportation and has urged the federal government to decide about the fate of incoming refugees more quickly than ever. The Left Party’s parliamentary leader Sahra Wagenknecht has attacked Chancellor Merkel from the right, declaring, “The reception and integration of large numbers of refugees and immigrants is a significant challenge and is more difficult than Merkel’s frivolous, ‘we can do it’, as she tried to tell us last autumn”.



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