

Germany, France criticize Trump's immigration ban

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Amid growing protests across the United States and internationally against US President Donald Trump's order denying access to the United States to travelers from seven Muslim countries, German and French officials criticized the ban this weekend. On Saturday, newly installed German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel and his French counterpart, Jean-Marc Ayrault, pledged to raise the issue in future talks with Rex Tillerson, Trump's nominee to be US Secretary of State, once he takes office.

The ban "can only worry us," Ayrault declared. "We have signed international obligations, so welcoming refugees fleeing war and oppression forms part of our duties ... There are many other issues that worry us. This is why Sigmar and I also discussed what we are going to do. When our colleague, Tillerson, is officially appointed, we will both contact him."

Gabriel claimed that Trump's policies broke with Western traditions of offering refuge to the persecuted: "Love thy neighbor is part of this tradition, the act of helping others. This unites us, we Westerners. And I think that this remains a common foundation that we share with the United States, one we aim to promote."

Trump's immigration ban is unquestionably reactionary and anti-democratic, underscoring the rapid move in the United States towards police-state forms of rule. Nonetheless, the criticisms of Trump from Berlin and Paris are hypocritical to the core. They aim to shield the European Union (EU) from growing mass anger over the persecution of Muslims and immigrants, and prepare to assert the imperialist interests of a European alliance led by Berlin and Paris against Washington.

Having joined Washington in arming Islamist militias in civil wars for regime change in Libya and Syria, the EU powers are implicated in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and the turning of tens of millions into refugees—over a million of whom fled to Europe in horrific conditions. Gabriel's fatuous invocation of a

policy of "love thy neighbor" notwithstanding, the EU's treatment of refugees was as thuggish and politically criminal as Trump's.

As the refugee crisis escalated, the EU canceled rescue operations in the Mediterranean under the Mare Nostrum program, hoping to deter migrants from coming to Europe with reports of mass drownings in the Mediterranean. Canceling the program would "probably lead to a higher number of deaths," EU border agency Frontex wrote in a paper applauding that decision, since it anticipated that this meant "significantly fewer migrants will attempt to cross the Mediterranean." Over 5,000 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean last year.

Refugees who arrived in Europe were herded into detention camps across Europe, blocked from going to countries of their choice, and targeted with arbitrary expulsion orders in Germany and other EU member states.

Responding to criticisms of Trump, Italian Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano told the *Corriere della Sera* that Europe "is not in a good position to give opinions about the choices of others. Or is it that we want to forget that we too erect walls in Europe?"

Meanwhile, far-right politicians across Europe hailed Trump's ban. "No more immigration from any Islamic country is exactly what we need ... Islam and freedom are incompatible," said Geert Wilders of Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, while Matteo Salvini of Italy's Northern League declared, "An invasion is under way, it needs to be blocked."

European capitalism does not represent a kinder, more reasonable alternative to Trump. Its record underscores that Trump's reckless policies during his first week in office are not the product of Trump personally, or even the deep decay of American capitalism, but of the contradictions of world capitalism as a whole. This is the driving force of the social and political collapse that has

led to the imperialist war drive and the international victimization of immigrants and foreigners, of which Trump is the most finished and noxious expression.

European politicians who are criticizing Trump's militaristic and anti-democratic politicians are also defending Germany's moves to re-militarize its foreign policy, and France's effectively permanent state of emergency, which has been used to assault social protests against austerity.

More lies behind their cynical and carefully calibrated criticisms of the Trump administration, however, than just a reaction to anti-Trump protests, aiming to defuse them. As Trump's reactionary rampage discredits Washington internationally, they are seeking to better position the leading powers on the European continent—primarily Germany and France—to benefit.

From a summit of Southern European countries in Lisbon on Saturday, French President François Hollande called for European opposition to Trump's policies—not only on the refugee ban, but over a broad range of subjects, underscoring the EU powers' sharp dissatisfaction with US foreign policy.

“When the president of the United States mentions climate to say that he is not convinced of the usefulness of [the Paris climate] accord, we must respond,” Hollande said. “When he adds protectionist measures, which could destabilize entire economies, not simply European economies but those of the world, we must respond and when he refuses the arrival of refugees, where Europe has done its duty, we must respond.”

Hollande also attacked Trump's attempt to split the EU by holding up Britain's exit from the EU as a model for all of Europe. “When there are declarations coming from the president of the United States about Europe, and when he talks about Brexit as a model for other countries, I believe that we have to respond,” Hollande said. “We must clearly state our positions and launch a dialogue with firmness about what we think.”

Significantly, Hollande did not criticize Trump's orders to the Pentagon to prepare for war with the United States' “near peer competitors,” including nuclear-armed Russia and China and, potentially, the European powers themselves. On military matters, the French president indicated that he hoped a deal could be reached with Washington. Referring to Syria, Iraq and Russia, he said that “all of that should be the subject of dialogue” with Trump.

Nonetheless, Berlin, Paris and other allied EU states are unquestionably moving to make broad inroads in US

imperialism's commercial and strategic positions internationally—a strategy that can only lead, sooner rather than later, to a potentially catastrophic military clash with Washington.

Speaking to the German financial paper *Handelsblatt*, Gabriel laid out an aggressive German-led commercial strategy aimed at the United States internationally. “If Trump launches a trade war with Asia and South America, this also opens up chances for us,” Gabriel said, adding: “Europe should rapidly work on a new Asian foreign policy ... If US protectionism produces a situation in which new opportunities for Europe open up in all of Asia, we must intervene.”

Gabriel added that Brexit offered Berlin and Paris an opportunity to refashion the EU in order to strengthen their power inside it. “We also have the opportunity to develop the cooperation of a group inside the EU—above all, the [euro] currency union—and then integrate a second ring of EU states more weakly,” he said. “That would also very much reduce the tensions inside Europe and really strengthen core Europe.”

A major target of a “core Europe” dominated by Berlin, in alliance with Paris, would be the working class in Europe itself. In an interview to the *Daily Telegraph*, Jürgen Stark, a former vice president of Germany's Bundesbank, proposed to expel Italy, Greece and other countries from the euro zone in order to strengthen a “core” euro zone: Germany, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. Stark hoped this would allow for tougher monetary policies and force politicians to implement even more drastic austerity programs.

“As long as the [European Central Bank] gives a signal in its operations that ‘we are the backstop’ and ‘we will prevent country A or country B from becoming insolvent,’ there will be no structural reforms,” Stark said. “The politicians don't feel the heat.”



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