

German Chancellor Merkel promotes harsher deportation policies

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel told the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) parliamentary group at the end of August that in refugee policy “the most important thing in the coming months is repatriation, repatriation and again repatriation.”

Last Thursday, the chancellor met with the minister presidents of Germany’s states to put this slogan into practice. In place of the so-called “welcoming culture” a “deportation culture” has emerged which could certainly be compared to the policies of US President Donald Trump.

Prior to the summit in the chancellor’s office, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) urged a “joint pooling of forces” to deport refugees in large numbers. The minister presidents then agreed on a 15-point plan which drastically curtails immigrant rights, and supports more frequent and quicker deportations.

The measures were supported by state presidents from all political parties. Only the President of Thuringia Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) stayed away from the summit out of tactical considerations.

The 15-point plan includes the following measures:

The reasons for detention pending deportation will be increased. In the future, rejected asylum seekers can be interned if they are accused of endangering public security or order. Such preventive detention violates current laws, and the utterly unclear concept of a “threat” in criminal law opens the door wide to police arbitrariness.

“Custody pending departure,” a euphemism for the detention of entire families, is being lengthened to 10 days. This violates EU law, which bans arbitrary measures without constitutional review.

The police and intelligence surveillance of foreigners required to leave will be significantly expanded. The smart phones and SIM cards of refugees who are not

cooperative enough during identification checks can be confiscated and examined. In addition, the federal office for migration and refugees can also pass sensitive data to the police authorities.

Rejected asylum seekers can have stricter residency requirements imposed upon them so that they are not permitted to leave the area or city in which they live. Refugees can also be sanctioned more strictly with benefit cuts and employment bans.

Until now, refugees who had held tolerated status in Germany for at least a year could challenge a deportation order within one month. This option shall be restricted so that tolerated refugees can expect to be deported at any time.

Asylum seekers who are deemed not to have a “perspective of staying” prior to their first hearing can be compelled to stay at arrival centres. They “are to be sent back from the arrival centre as soon as possible after the commencement of the requirement to depart.” In this way, the permanent internment of refugees will become the norm. The refugee camps will thus become “centres of organised hopelessness,” as refugee support organisation ProAsyl has noted.

The heads of government at the federal and state levels have also agreed to create “a sufficient number of detention pending deportation places within close distance of central departure institutions.” In addition, “a centre to support return” will be established to coordinate deportation measures between the federal and state governments and press ahead with mass deportations, especially to Afghanistan.

The Interior Ministry also intends to expand the number of the so-called Dublin regulations. Refugees will be sent back to the country where they first entered European Union territory. According to Interior Minister de Maizière, there will soon be “Dublin

transfers” to Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria, even though refugees are abused in those countries and there is no functioning asylum system or adequate accommodation.

And finally, the so-called “voluntary repatriation” of refugees will be intensified. An additional €90 million is to be made available for this. In this procedure, refugees will face pressure already during asylum hearings to return “voluntarily” to their homeland in exchange for a small incentive. The repatriation programme “Starthilfe plus” listed countries gripped by civil war, including Afghanistan, Syria and Eritrea as targets for voluntary repatriation.

If one includes the refugee deal with Turkey, the systematic sealing off of the Balkan route and the Mediterranean as well as the attempts of the European Union to build detention centres in North Africa for refugees, these measures hardly differ from the bullying, internment and deportation of refugees adopted by the Trump administration. Constitutional principles are being thrown overboard and human rights trampled underfoot.

The right to asylum has been restricted several times in Germany since the autumn of 2015 to deter refugees. Benefits have been cut, residency requirements reintroduced and toughened, family reunification made more difficult and deportations pushed forward.

Now the criteria for the acceptance of asylum seekers are to be arbitrarily intensified. The decision paper from the heads of government meeting states early on, “In the coming months, the BAMF [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees] will in the future reject a high number of asylum applications from people who do not require protection in Germany.”

Chancellor’s office Minister Peter Altmeier (CDU) told Bavarian Radio, “We assume that deportations will be more frequent and quicker from all states, including to Afghanistan.” This should also result in fewer people setting out to Germany.

It is significant that the government has hired the consultancy firm McKinsey, which is normally tasked with rationalising business operations, to produce a study on the deportation of refugees. Refugees are being treated like cattle whose deportation is a mere matter of feasibility and cost-effectiveness.

Even though only 150,000 tolerated refugees who currently live in Germany are obliged to leave, the

McKinsey study assumes that the number could rise to 485,000 in 2017.

The stepped-up actions against refugees were agreed to by an all-party coalition. For the Social Democrats, Justice Minister Heiko Mas praised the package of measures, “Only if we enforce our regulations can we permanently achieve acceptance for migration.”

A despicable role is being played by the Left Party. Their interior policy spokeswoman in parliament publicly described the measures as “competition of shamelessness in deportation policy” and attacked the expansion of federal authority in deportations for suppressing “humanitarian considerations, which luckily are still employed in some states.”

However, the Thuringia state government noted its readiness in the protocol to the 15-point plan to enforce the obligation to return for rejected asylum seekers. It merely intends to rely more heavily on the so-called “voluntary” repatriation, because “the support of voluntary return [is] an efficient instrument.” And in Berlin and Brandenburg, where the Left Party is also in government, the party has not raised any principled objections to the measures.



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