# Germany resumes deportation of refugees to Greece

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Germany is to deport refugees to Greece for the first time since 2011, even though asylum seekers in the country confront catastrophic conditions and frequently end up homeless or living in extreme poverty. According to official announcements, both countries' interior ministries have agreed to treat the refugees in line with the Dublin III regulations. In reality, the Syriza government in Athens initially opposed the demands for the reintroduction of the Dublin III provisions made by Germany, France, and the European Commission, but has finally fallen into line.

The Dublin III provisions adopted by the European Union (EU) member states allow for refugees to be deported to the country where they first arrived in the EU or were registered as asylum seekers. The German Interior Ministry told the television news programme *Report Mainz* that 392 transfer requests had been submitted to the Greek government under the Dublin III provisions and the first acceptances from the Greek side had been received.

Greece's Interior Minister Ioannis Mouzalas justified the decision to *Report Mainz* by stating, "We have only now approved a small number of Dublin cases for the first time from Germany and some other EU states. The asylum authorities in Germany and Greece are currently working on implementing this. There was pressure from the EU states for us to accept deportations to Greece once again. I understand that the governments want to show their populations that they are doing something. And that's why I want to help them."

The subservient approach of the non-party interior minister towards the EU is typical of the Syriza government, which while initially pledging its determination to resist the dictates from Brussels, ultimately acceded to all of the EU's demands.

As recently as March, Mouzalas told *Spiegel Online*, "We are not in a position to implement a return to the Dublin regulations. I would like the Germans to understand that the reason is not political or ideological, and it is not that we do not value the assistance from Germany. Greece simply has no capacity to deal with the arrival of more refugees. We have just managed to pull ourselves together. Please don't make us flounder again."

In the end, the interest in reaching a compromise with the EU proved weightier than the pure misery into which refugees will be thrust with the recommencement of the Dublin regulations. According to this procedure, the countries on the EU's southern border, chiefly Greece and Italy, will accommodate and provide for the lion's share of refugees seeking protection in Europe.

The Dublin procedure is aimed above all at deterring refugees from coming to Europe. In Italy and Greece, refugees confront a vast bureaucracy that endlessly drags out the asylum process, resulting in it taking many months, if not years, to complete.

Refugees are usually confined for the duration of the asylum process in camps, where they have to live under deplorably unhygienic conditions and receive insufficient food. There are more than 20,000 children among the 62,000 refugees currently living in Greece in catastrophic conditions.

The refugee camps are massively overcrowded. This is especially the case on the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos. On these islands, 15,000 people are crammed together in internment camps built to house only 10,000. In Chios, 3,500 people are confined in a camp built for just 1,100, while on Samos more than 2,400 people are in a camp designed for 850.

At the notorious Moria camp on Lesbos, where 4,500 people vegetate in extremely cramped conditions, even though the camp only has places for 3,500, the situation escalated dramatically around two weeks ago.

Following a march of 1,000 refugees protesting for their release and freedom, a fire broke out once again in the camp. The police subsequently seized 35 refugees at random, and they are now facing charges of arson. Lawyer Lorraine Leete, who advises refugees on asylum matters in the camp, told *Tagesspiegel* that the police acted on the basis of racism. "When everything had calmed down, the police entered the camp and searched for West Africans. All on the

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basis of race," she said.

Even recognised asylum seekers live in Greece under impoverished conditions, as *Report Mainz* uncovered. Since they cannot claim state assistance, they end up homeless and must wait in line at public soup kitchens to get their sole meal each day. There is no hope of work or language courses.

The refugee aid organisation ProAsyl has therefore sharply condemned the deportation of refugees to Greece. "That is a lapse. The situation in Greece is as catastrophic as it has ever been, many refugees are homeless, the country urgently requires more assistance. It is simply not possible to deport people there."

But the German government, which wants to return to the Dublin process at any price, has no interest in the misery facing people in need of protection.

In January 2011, the European Court of Justice ruled that deporting refugees to Greece under the Dublin Accord was impermissible because refugees would be exposed to "humiliating and inhumane treatment." Germany's interior minister at the time, Thomas de Maiziere, initially suspended deportations to Greece for a year, but was forced to repeatedly extend the moratorium.

The influx of more than a million refugees into Europe between the summer of 2015 and April 2016, mainly from Syria and Iraq, threw the Dublin procedure into crisis. Since the conclusion of a dirty deal between the EU and Turkey and the sealing off of the Balkan route, the German government has been working at the European level to reintroduce the Dublin regulations.

Berlin achieved its first success in December 2016, when the EU Commission recommended readmitting Greece to the Dublin regulations because conditions in refugee camps had allegedly improved.

Greece's Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias protested at the time against deportations to the country. He told German daily *Die Welt*, "There are some EU states who think they can use southern Italy and Greece as closed boxes where refugees can be stored." Nonetheless, the EU Commission announced in March that "the readmittance of Greece to the Dublin system is an essential element of our comprehensive strategy to jointly improve our migration management."

A similar tone was struck by the German Interior Ministry, which released an announcement declaring that "the stabilisation of a functioning Dublin system is an indispensable component of the comprehensive efforts to stabilise our policies on asylum, migration and borders."

This means nothing else than making the EU's borders impenetrable to refugees. Those who, in spite of this, manage to breach "fortress Europe," will have their existence turned into a living hell by being sent back to the worst camps on the continent.

The inhumane Dublin system, whose death had already been proclaimed, has also been revived by the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The ECJ ruled on July 26 that the Dublin regulations were still valid even during the period when refugees were being "waved through" the Balkan route in the late summer of 2015. The ECJ thereby ruled against two Afghan families and a Syrian refugee who appealed against their deportation to Croatia from Austria and Slovenia, respectively. The ECJ declared the deportations to be lawful.

The ECJ ruling was generally interpreted as being inapplicable to the refugees who have arrived in Germany because in the late summer of 2015, the German government declared refugees had a "right of entry" and thereby assumed responsibility for the asylum proceedings. Nonetheless, the interior affairs spokesman for the CDU/CSU in parliament, Florian Mayer (CSU), demanded, "In Germany, we must now evaluate in detail the opportunities which arise to repatriate asylum seekers to the EU member state originally responsible for them."

Although the deportations to Greece allegedly only affect those refugees who travelled to Germany from Greece after March 15, 2017, it could rapidly be expanded to tens of thousands of additional cases. Alongside de Maiziere, the Social Democrats are the driving force behind this. It was then-Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel who in March initiated discussions with the Greek government to negotiate the planned deportations. The new SPD Chairman Martin Schulz has since begun agitating against refugees.

With consummate cynicism, the German government intends to enforce the mass deportation of refugees while at the same time continuing to refuse to allow families to reunite. According to figures from ProAsyl, more than 2,000 refugees requiring medical care or dependent upon their relatives currently in Germany, are in Greece awaiting approval to travel to Germany. Even though they have a right to reunite with their families, the German embassy in Athens has refused to issue the required visa. Several refugees have died as a result of the hardline stance adopted by the German embassy and the lack of medical care.

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