

German government incites racism with commemoration of right-wing terrorist attack in Hanau, refugee policy

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Leading members of the German state and federal government participated Tuesday and Wednesday in commemoration ceremonies for the nine people from immigrant backgrounds shot by a right-wing racist last month in Hanau.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier remarked in Hanau that the crime had a pre-history: “A pre-history of discrimination against and exclusion of people with an immigration background, Muslims, and so-called foreigners. A pre-history of ideological incitement and agitation.”

Federal parliament President Wolfgang Schäuble declared during a Bundestag sitting that Hanau demanded “an honest self-criticism of politics. Such crazy acts do not emerge out of thin air,” he added. “They develop in a poisonous social climate, in which prejudices against foreigners and the most absurd conspiracy theories are encouraged.” The state must “acknowledge that it has underestimated the danger posed by right-wing extremism for too long,” Schäuble said.

The state has not “underestimated” the danger posed by the far-right, but rather systematically incited and encouraged it. The ideological arsonists referred to by Steinmeier are in reality himself, Schäuble and the leaders of all parties in parliament. And that will not be changed by a few hypocritical speeches in the wake of the terrorist attack in Hanau.

Among the speakers in the parliamentary debate was Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU), who stated following the neo-Nazi rampage through Chemnitz in 2018 that immigration was “the mother of all political problems in this country.” Now, he claims, the greatest danger in

Germany comes from the far-right. The threat posed by right-wing extremists in this country is very high and cannot be relativised by anything, he said.

Yet Seehofer had shortly before returned from a trip to Brussels, where the 27 European Union (EU) interior ministers met to strengthen their support for Greece’s war on immigrants at the Greek-Turkish border.

The Greek police and military used tear gas, flash grenades, and live ammunition against tens of thousands of men, women, and children seeking refuge from the war in Syria and the miserable social conditions in Turkey. The Greek government is encouraging gangs of neo-Nazi thugs to attack journalists and refugees. The horrific character of the scenes reaching the public through eyewitness testimony and video clips, notwithstanding the efforts of the Greek government to hinder the work of the press, can hardly be exaggerated.

The EU interior ministers not only withheld any criticism of Athens’ actions; they also unequivocally backed the Greek government’s brutal policies and praised it for carrying them out. Seehofer stood out in particular in this regard. “Greece is fulfilling a crucial task for all of Europe, specifically the protection of our external borders,” he said in Brussels. And the country is doing this “very well.”

One day earlier, the federal government rejected a motion in parliament from the Greens to resettle 5,000 particularly vulnerable refugees—children travelling alone, pregnant women, single women, single parents, and the mentally traumatised. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), CSU and Social Democratic Party (SPD) voted against the proposal.

In several interviews, Seehofer used the slogan:

“Order first, then humanity.” “Orderly procedures” on Europe’s external borders are the precondition for resolving humanitarian problems, his spokesperson explained. So long as Europe’s external borders are not functioning, no refugees can be resettled, not even children in need of protection, he said.

The difference between appearance and essence, between political propaganda and practice, could not be clearer. While the heads of state and the government complain hypocritically about the poisonous social climate in which far-right terrorism is strengthened, they continue to pursue the very policies that poison this climate. They are putting the programme of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) programme into practice and thereby strengthening racists and neo-Nazis.

Four years ago, AfD politicians Frauke Petry and Beatrix von Storch triggered a wave of public outrage when they suggested that firearms should be used to prevent women and children from crossing Europe’s borders. This is now official government policy.

Seehofer and the other EU interior ministers not only backed the brutal actions of the Greek government, but also adopted a package of measures to support them.

Seven patrol ships, two helicopters, a plane and three vehicles with night-vision capabilities will be deployed to the Greek-Turkish border, while the 540-strong contingent of EU Frontex border guards will be increased by 100. Frontex will also coordinate a programme to carry out accelerated deportations of people seeking refuge to their countries of origin. To this end, the EU will send another 160 decisionmakers to Greece and invest €100 million.

Leading EU representatives visited the border region on Tuesday, where they declared their admiration for the Greek security forces’ brutal crackdown. “We were just in the border region and we saw how tense and difficult the situation is,” EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen remarked at a press conference. She explicitly thanked the Greek coastguard, police, civilians, military personnel, and Frontex forces for their “tireless efforts.”

“We came here today to make clear our solidarity with and support for Greece,” continued the former German defence minister. “The maintenance of order on the external Greek border has highest priority for us, as it is also a European external border. I commit

myself unconditionally to mobilise the operational support required by the Greek authorities.”

Margaritis Schinas, the Greek EU commissioner responsible for “the European way of life,” spoke along similar lines. “In this extraordinary situation, the first priority is the securing of order on our borders,” he said. “Greece cannot be left to deal with this difficult task alone; it is the responsibility of Europe as a whole. We have to make it unmistakably clear that the European Union as a whole uses its strength to support member states who are under external pressure.”

The EU’s brutal crackdown on refugees can only be understood in the context of the systematic preparations for dictatorship and war with which the ruling elite is responding to mounting international tensions and growing social conflicts.

With a population of 445 million, the European Union could immediately accept tens of thousands of the hundreds of thousands of refugees without major difficulty. Many of the reception centres built during the 2015 refugee crisis are standing empty. One hundred forty German cities have declared their readiness to accept refugees from Greece. According to Berlin’s state senator for social affairs, Elke Breitenbach, around 2,000 places in the facilities of the state office for refugee affairs are available in Berlin alone.

But the ruling elite is determined to make an example of the refugees on the Greek-Turkish border, setting a precedent that will be used to suppress all social protests and class conflicts. In France, the police have already deployed military weaponry against “yellow vest” protesters and striking workers, leading to many serious injuries.

The defence of the refugees is therefore not merely an elementary question of humanity and solidarity, but also an inseparable part of the struggle for basic democratic rights and the fight against the far-right.



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