Spain’s PSOE-Podemos government sends police to Greece to attack migrants

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Spain’s misnamed “progressive coalition” government between the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the pseudo-left Podemos party has announced it will send police to support Greece’s conservative New Democracy (ND) government in its savage crackdown on migrants.

Last week, the world watched in horror as thousands of desperate migrants confronted barbed-wire fences on Greece’s eastern land border with Turkey, while Greek security forces in full anti-riot gear beat them with batons and shot rubber bullets and tear gas. However, Spain’s PSOE-Podemos government announced it would not only support the Greek government but send police reinforcements to Greece.

In a Council of European Interior Ministers meeting last Wednesday, the Spanish government said it could offer Greece and Frontex, the European agency responsible for controlling EU borders, more cash and equipment. After the meeting, Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said: “Greece, and also Bulgaria and Cyprus, can count on Spain to jointly address the current situation.”

Madrid announced it would send National Police and paramilitary Civil Guard units to participate in Frontex’ “Rapid Response Team.” Currently, Spain has committed 111 officers, according to Frontex. The number of additional Spanish forces has yet to be released.

Last week, amid bloody fighting along the Syrian-Turkish border, Turkey indicated it would no longer block some 3.5 million Syrian refugees from trying to flee from Turkey to Europe via Greece. Since then, thousands of refugees have tried to enter the European Union (EU) via Greece and Bulgaria. More than 32,000 migrants have been arrested at the Greek land border.

The police sent by Madrid, which Deputy Prime Minister and Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias recently hailed for its “migrant policy which respects human rights,” will participate alongside Greek and EU security forces. Their brutal actions include:

• Stripping migrants to their underwear before savagely beating

• Robbing their money, mobile phones and passports

• Shooting live ammunition in the air frequently to spread terror

• Using the water cannon and tear gassing innocent refuges, including children and babies

Spain’s police are well versed in such practices. In 2014, Civil Guards tried to repel migrants, refugees and asylum seekers trying to cross the Spanish border at Ceuta by swimming around the Tarajal seawall by shooting the swimming migrants with rubber bullets and tear gas. Fourteen died.

Spain’s police will now join far-right vigilante groups and members of Greek neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party under the framework of the EU’s fascistic policy against migrants—a week after Iglesias cynically called for a “European agreement against the extreme right in defense of democracy.”

It has now been widely reported that Golden Dawn members with wooden clubs are patrolling the Greek islands, terrorizing migrants, aid workers and journalists, with police support. They are setting up roadblocks, assaulting aid workers and journalists, as well as the refugees themselves. On the Greek island of Lesbos, far-right vigilantes beat up a German photojournalist and a correspondent and assaulted an UN official. Many NGOs have decided to evacuate staff for their own safety.

Spain’s refugee policy is not fundamentally different from that of Greece. In fact, the idea of “fortress Europe” was first applied in Spain. These measures included not only fortified frontiers, increasing police repression, militarised borders, and razor-wire fences, but also the first attempt to externalize border control—in Spain’s case, with Morocco. This policy, initiated in the late 1990s, has continued ever since.

Spain continues to lobby the EU to fund Morocco. Last

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December, the EU Commission adopted a new €389 million cooperation programme for Morocco "to support reforms, inclusive development and border management and work towards developing a 'Euro-Moroccan partnership for shared prosperity'."

Interior Minister Marlaska gleefully supports Morocco's major role in curbing migration. Last month, he applauded the drop in 50 percent in new arrivals in 2019, adding that the drop is due to cooperation with Morocco. Marlaska said that Spain showed that "the prevention-based policy works." According to Rabat, Morocco's security services aborted 73,973 migration attempts in 2019.

Marlaska was silent on the hundreds of deaths provoked by his policy, as migrant drownings in the western Mediterranean continue. In the first 10 months of 2019, 325 drownings were recorded.

The crackdown has also led to deaths on land. In 2018, two migrants died due to police brutality when Morocco renewed its crackdown against thousands of migrants attempting to enter Europe through Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and by boat across the Mediterranean Sea.

Madrid has also welcomed the reactionary ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), overturning a previous ruling and upholding Spain's expulsion of two migrants from the Spanish enclave of Melilla into Morocco. The expulsion was part of many so-called "hot returns" that the Spanish police regularly carry out. This is the practice of immediately returning a migrant who has set foot in Spanish territory without even undergoing identification or any form of juridical procedure, trampling the right to asylum.

While Spain previously tended to not acknowledge "hot returns" or claimed that they happened within Morocco, the ECHR's decision endorses Spain's policy and allows all European countries to follow suit.

The German daily, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, acknowledged the ruling's wide implications, writing: "The ruling from Strasbourg will further encourage the sometimes brutal practice of deporting refugees. With such 'push-backs' Europe protects itself from those who need its protection."

While both Podemos and the PSOE criticized "hot returns" while they were in opposition, these have actually increased since they entered government in mid-2018. In 2018, 658 "hot returns" were registered in Ceuta and Melilla—51 more than in 2017, according to official data.

Marlaska welcomed the ECHR decision, saying it "gives legal security to the great work of the Civil Guard." Weeks later, he accused the migrants of violent actions to enter Spain, justifying "hot returns" by saying that "violence [caused when jumping the fence in Ceuta and Melilla] limits the use of fundamental rights." Echoing US President Donald Trump, Marlaska said he wanted to make the Melilla border fence 30 percent higher.

The role of Podemos could not be more cynical. Iglesias said in an interview in public television TVE that this practice would not be implemented again as it goes against the fundamental rights of immigrants who receive no legal or health assistance.

"This government has a policy on migration that will be respectful of human rights and it is a consensus that 'hot returns' are not respectful of human rights," Iglesias argued. "I have heard this from the lips of Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska himself" he added. Hours later, an official from the Ministry of Interior denied having said this and since then, Iglesias has remained silent on the issue.

Last January, the WSWS warned in "Podemos enters Spanish government" that "Despite the attempts of supporters of the PSOE and Podemos to promote the new government as 'democratic,' it will prove bitterly hostile to the social and democratic rights of the working class." The PSOE, it warned, is the Spanish bourgeoisie's traditional party of government since the fascist Francoite regime fell in 1978 and has a decades-long record of imperialist wars and EU austerity.

As for Podemos, it made its alliance with the PSOE last year while supporting the PSOE's pledges of billions in EU social cuts, its violent crackdown on protests in Catalonia and blockades of refugee ships in the Mediterranean. The WSWS warned, "In the PSOE-Podemos government the working class confronts no less bitter an enemy than it confronts in the fascistic parties themselves." Its brutal anti-refugee policy further vindicates this assessment.

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