

Afghan refugees face steel border walls and barbed wire from Europe's powers

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Since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban on August 15, governments internationally have engaged in non-stop handwringing over the fate of tens of thousands of refugees desperate to flee the country. These are the same governments whose wars over the last three decades, including in Afghanistan, have turned tens of millions of people into refugees and destroyed entire societies.

Twenty years of war, with the imperialist military forces only finally departing this month, have left 550,000 internally displaced in Afghanistan since the beginning of this year, adding to the almost 3 million Afghans who had met this fate by the end of 2020.

For all the crocodile tears shed over those who worked with the occupation now seeking to flee, Europe's governments, since the fall of the Taliban, have refused to take more than a few thousand refugees.

In 2015, far-right political forces mobilised against German Chancellor Angela Merkel's policy to open the country's borders to allow in around 1 million refugees from the Syrian war in a settlement scheme. This time there is to be no such policy, with the European Union (EU) and its member states focusing on tightening the borders of Fortress Europe.

On Sunday, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa tweeted, "The EU will NOT open any European migration corridors for Afghanistan" stating there would be no repeat of the "strategic mistake" of 2015. Slovenia is the current holder of the six-month rotating EU presidency. Jansa, a former Stalinist and right-wing zealot, is a close ally of the fascistic Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orban.

Jansa's statement was opposed by European Parliament president Davide Sassoli, but it accurately reflects EU policy. In a statement issued August 18,

three days after the fall of Kabul, EU Commissioner Ylva Julia Margareta Johansson declared from an extraordinary meeting of Interior Ministers, "We should not wait until people arrive at the external borders of the European Union. This is not a solution. We should prevent people from heading towards the European Union through unsafe, irregular and uncontrolled routes run by smugglers."

The problem was not Europe's, as "A significant number of Afghan nationals have already fled to neighbouring countries. ... We will continue our ongoing programmes and intensify our cooperation with host communities in Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan, as well as other countries in the region such as Turkey."

No concrete plans were put in place for any EU member to take in a single Afghan refugee. The major powers have concentrated solely on getting their military forces out, and a few thousand civilian personnel who helped prop up President Ashraf Ghani's puppet government.

Armin Laschet, leader of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, whom Merkel has backed to succeed her as chancellor, tweeted almost as soon as Kabul fell, "The mistakes regarding the Syrian civil war must not be made again ... 2015 shall not be repeated." A day later Alice Weidel, leader of the far-right main opposition party Alternative for Germany, declared, "2015 must not be allowed to repeat itself. Genuine refugees must be helped in their home region if possible."

French President Emmanuel Macron refused to commit to taking any refugees from Afghanistan, declaring his main concern that France had to "anticipate and protect itself from a wave of migrants." Paris would insist on an "initiative to build a robust,

coordinated and united response without delay, which will involve the fight against irregular flows ... and the establishment of cooperation with transit and host countries such as Pakistan, Turkey and Iran.”

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said Sunday that he was “clearly against the fact that we now voluntarily accept more people—that will not happen under my chancellorship either.” Instead, “We have to deport as long as possible.”

Britain will take in just 5,000 Afghan people this year, as part of its Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme, chosen from those who collaborated alongside UK forces or officials. These are “Afghans who have supported British efforts in Afghanistan, for example interpreters and other personnel.” Among those listed as priorities to enter are “Afghan government officials”. Only another 20,000 will be allowed to enter over the next few years.

The US has promised to take just 10,000 people from Afghanistan out of a population of 38 million. Australia will take in 3,000, the figure they were already committed to under an existing programme.

The now forbidden policy of 2015 was abandoned rapidly by Germany in 2016. On behalf of the EU, Merkel signed an agreement that year with Greece’s pseudo-left Syriza government and Turkey to seal off Europe’s southern border to asylum seekers. Under this filthy deal—a flagrant violation of international law effectively abolishing the right to asylum—the EU pays Turkey’s authoritarian regime billions to take in tens of thousands of migrants. Greece facilitates the mass deportation of refugees to Turkey as they reach the EU’s shores via the Aegean Sea.

Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi announced as the Taliban came to power, “Our country will not be a gateway to Europe for illegal Afghan migrants.”

Epitomising the vicious response of the EU powers to refugee victims of their wars, Greece announced last Friday that it had completed sealing off its northern border with Turkey with a massive 40km (25-mile) steel fence and new electronic monitoring system. Work to complete the wall, initially begun in 2012, and continued by Syriza while in power (2015-2019), was rushed ahead due to events in Afghanistan. Last Friday, Michalis Chrisochoidis, the Citizens’ Protection Minister of Greece’s New Democracy government, visited the region of Evros alongside the defence

minister and head of the armed forces to inspect the border wall. He declared the fall of Kabul had created “possibilities for migrant flows ... We cannot wait, passively, for the possible impact... Our borders will remain safe and inviolable.”

Every single land route is being systematically closed off to refugees by fences and barbed wire and every sea passage by patrol ships.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan warned that Turkey would not become “Europe’s migrant storage unit”. Mehmet Emin Bilmez, governor of the eastern border province of Van, said, “We want to show the whole world that our borders are unpassable ... Our biggest hope is that there is no migrant wave from Afghanistan.”

On Monday, Ankara announced it would add by the end of the year another 64 km to its existing three-metre-high border wall with Iran. The wall, started in 2017, will prevent entry to Turkey by any refugee making the weeks-long journey across Iran on foot. Reuters reported that the rest of the 560 km frontier would be fortified by “Ditches, wire and security patrols around the clock”.

Britain’s Home Secretary Priti Patel is enforcing one of the most restrictive anti-immigration policies on the planet, with much of it modelled on the savage system imposed in Greece. In a newspaper column Sunday, UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace wrote that the Johnson government would set up “A series of ‘processing hubs’... in countries neighboring Afghanistan for refugees who manage to escape. If they can establish their right to come to the UK, they will be flown to Britain.”

On Sunday, Turkey denied that it would allow such a hub on its territory with its foreign ministry warning, “It is not possible for us to accept it even if such a request was made in this regard.”



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