

Hysterical smear campaign against refugees arriving from Belarus

Peter Schwarz
29 October 2021

German and European politicians are reacting with a hysterical witch-hunt to the influx of several thousand refugees from Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other war zones who are entering the Schengen area via Belarus.

The mistreatment of the refugees, in violation of international law, is being accompanied by press censorship, the construction of metres-high border walls, fierce threats against Belarus and Russia, and the establishment of a police state within Europe. The scale and intensity of the campaign is reminiscent of former US President Donald Trump's smear campaign against refugees and the construction of a wall on the Mexican border to mobilize fascist forces against the working class.

Since Belarus lifted visa-free travel for several Middle Eastern and African countries in the summer, more refugees have flown from there to Minsk, then travelled overland to the Baltic states or Poland, and from there to Germany.

Their numbers are manageable. According to the Federal Police, just under 7,000 refugees have arrived in Germany via this route since the beginning of the year. That is only a small fraction of the 890,000 asylum seekers registered at the peak of the mass flight movement in 2015. Although the number has risen significantly in October, it has since stabilized at around 120 a day.

Nevertheless, the propaganda from Warsaw, Berlin and Brussels sounds as if these are not traumatized people in need of protection and urgent help but a horde of barbarians invading Europe.

The Polish government is reacting with merciless brutality. It has stationed 6,000 soldiers at the border who hunt down refugees, mistreat them and send them back to Belarus without allowing them to apply for asylum, even though such pushbacks are strictly forbidden under international law.

The rejected refugees, including families and pregnant

women, are forced to languish in the boggy forest area in the damp and freezing cold without food, shelter, clean water and medical assistance. At least seven deaths have now been documented.

To further impede their escape, Poland is building a 2.5-metre-high barbed wire fence along a border more than 400 kilometres long, at an estimated cost of €350 million.

Lithuania has also begun construction of a 508-kilometre fence on its border with Belarus, which in its final stage will be four metres high and be reinforced with barbed wire. The cost is estimated at €152 million. Latvia plans to erect a fence by 2024.

To hide its crimes from the public, the Polish government has imposed a state of emergency along the border. Journalists and refugee workers are strictly forbidden from approaching the border and reporting on the human catastrophe.

Despite the government's censorship and agitation, there is much support and solidarity with the refugees among the Polish population. Last Saturday in Michalowo near the border, mothers, in particular, demonstrated against the mistreatment with chants of "Shame" and "No one is illegal." "We cannot stand idly by while children are forced to endure weeks in the cold, wet, dark forests on Polish territory," the organizers declared on Facebook.

In contrast, the Polish government received support for its criminal policy from Germany. Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) supports the construction of a wall on the border with Belarus. "It is legitimate that we protect the external border [of the EU] in such a way that undetected border crossings are prevented at the green border," he told *Bild am Sonntag*.

Seehofer also wants to tighten controls on the German-Polish border, which is normally open. He has already sent squads totalling 800 police officers to "closely

control the border area and the green border with Poland,” he told BamS.

Saxony’s state Prime Minister Michael Kretschmer (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) also defended the wall’s construction. “We need fences, and we probably need walls,” he said after talks with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels. The point now, he said, was “for the European Union to prove its defensibility.” After decades in which the CDU exploited the existence of the Berlin Wall, which the Stalinist regime in East Germany had built, for propaganda purposes, this latest turn has caused irritation even in its own ranks.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democratic Party, SPD) used the fate of the refugees to launch fierce attacks on Belarusian ruler Alexander Lukashenko, publicly accusing him of being the “head of a state smuggling ring” and of using “refugees as an instrument” to “exert pressure on European states.” Maas advocated that the EU impose sanctions on airlines transporting refugees to Belarus.

Brandenburg’s state Interior Minister Michael Stübgen (CDU) went even further. He accused the Russian government of being behind the refugee movement. “I assume that the whole thing was not worked out in Minsk alone, but together with the Kremlin,” he told the FAZ. “It’s a strategy that can be described as a new part of a hybrid warfare that Moscow is pursuing with the aim of destabilizing the European Union.”

Green Party leader Robert Habeck, who is expected to be vice chancellor of the next German government, also spoke of “hybrid warfare,” accusing Lukashenko of using people to do so. The EU must not give in to this “blackmail,” Habeck told the FAZ.

Many media commentaries expressed similar sentiments. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which has massively increased its presence in Germany, raved about “Fortress Europe” in the manner of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). As long as it was not possible to control immigration in any other way, “a fortress is still better than the alternative: Islamist subcultures, growing violent crime among perspective-less foreigners ...”

The FAZ called for support for the “affected states on Europe’s eastern flank” in securing their borders. “A border fence cannot only separate but also protect.”

The weekly magazine *Cicero* published an article by former Bundeswehr (army) general and long-time Merkel adviser Erich Vad, who linked support for the brutal

Polish border regime with calls for massive external and internal rearmament.

In a thinly veiled threat of war against Belarus, Vad compared the country to Libya. “We have learned that it is not enough to chase out dictators on human rights grounds—as in the case of Libya—but at the same time to shy away from using military means as well to ensure the establishment of a new order and the containment of a mass migration from there.

“Now it is Belarus, tomorrow it will again be the Balkans and North African countries,” Vad continued. “We need to learn anew and understand that the North African coastline and also the Middle East are important regions of our own security and not just allow their foreign and security development to run wild.” After the “massive reduction of the US presence in Europe,” he said, “Europeans must not allow a strategic vacuum to develop.”

To “protect the Schengen area,” Vad wants to establish a European Border Guard Force “to be deployed on land, sea and air.” He cites as models the French Gendarmerie and the Italian Carabinieri—both of which are paramilitary police units notorious for their brutal crackdowns on workers and opposition movements.

Vad’s contribution makes clear the real purpose of the smear campaign against the refugees: to stir up reactionary sentiments and mobilize right-wing forces to suppress growing opposition to social inequality, mass layoffs, policies of deliberate mass infection and preparation for future wars. The cruel and illegal methods used to seal off Fortress Europe, including in the Mediterranean, against refugees show the brutality the ruling class is capable of in the process. The parties of the current German government and any future coalition agree on these issues.

The defence of refugees is not only an elementary humanitarian imperative, it is also necessary to defend the democratic rights of working people as a whole and to fight the return of militarism and fascism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact