

EU adopts refugee policy of the extreme right

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“December 20, 2023, will go down in history,” said European Union Parliament President Roberta Metsola after representatives of the EU member states and the European Parliament finally agreed on a reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) a few days before Christmas. She was “very proud that we have found and implemented solutions with the Pact on Migration and Asylum.”

The day will indeed go down in history as the day on which the EU and its national governments openly adopted the anti-refugee programme of the far right. The implementation of the “solutions” approved by the EU means the abolition of the right to asylum, the extension of Fortress Europe, mass deportations and the detention even of women and children in deportation facilities similar to concentration camps.

Immediately after Metsola announced the deal, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) rejoiced on X/Twitter:

Parliament and the Council of Europe have now agreed on more decisive action against illegal migrants. Controls, registration of all non-EU citizens without passports without exception and asylum centres directly at the external borders to deport immigrants from safe countries as quickly as possible. The AfD has been calling for all of this for a long time.

The planned measures are barbaric and recall the darkest times in European history. With the deal, “the dystopian vision of a Europe of detention centres ... will become reality,” writes the refugee organisation Pro Asyl. Eve Geddie, director of Amnesty International’s Office for European Institutions, warns:

This agreement will set back European asylum law for decades. The likely result is an increase in suffering at every stage of the journey of a person seeking asylum in the EU.

Among other things, the deal provides for refugees to be detained directly at the EU’s external borders in the future. The

press release issued by the European Council and the European Parliament on December 21 states that the so-called Asylum Procedures Regulation (APR) will introduce a “mandatory border procedure” aimed at “quickly assessing at the EU’s external borders whether applications for asylum are unfounded or inadmissible.”

Persons subject to these asylum border procedures are “not authorised to enter the member state’s territory.” Instead, they must “remain at the disposal of the authorities at the screening location,” and “may be placed in detention.”

What this means in concrete terms is clear. Refugees will be locked up in detention centres surrounded by barbed wire, as is already the case at Europe’s external borders, where they can expect to be deported at any time.

In the press release, the EU calls on its member states to create “adequate capacity, in terms of reception and human resources”—specifically, 30,000 detention slots—to “allow them at any given moment to carry out the border procedure and to enforce return decisions for an identified number of applications.”

Practically all refugees who survive their deadly voyage across the Mediterranean are affected by the measures. The border procedure will be applied when a refugee “makes an application at an external border crossing point following apprehension in connection with an illegal border crossing and following disembarkation after a search and rescue operation at sea,” according to the EU press release.

The application of these border procedures is “mandatory” for three groups of people seeking protection:

- People from countries of origin with a “recognition rate below 20 percent,”

People—including unaccompanied minors—considered to be “a threat to national security or public order,”

People seeking protection who are accused of having “misled the authorities with false information or by withholding information.”

Pro Asyl describes the fact that there are no exceptions even for children and their families as “particularly dramatic.” This “ultimately means the detention of minors for months on end, which is incompatible with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

In the eyes of the EU, refugees are not people with rights who are in need of protection, but potential enemies who must be

monitored, deported and eradicated.

“Another pillar of the pact is the screening regulation,” boasts the EU. Its aim is to “strengthen checks on people at the external borders.” It “also ensures that the right procedure—such as repatriation to the country of origin ...—is initiated.” The checks include “identification and health and security checks, as well as fingerprinting and registration in the Eurodac database.”

In addition, the new law includes rules that apply when “migrants are instrumentalised for political purposes, i.e., foreign state actors using migratory flows to try to destabilise the EU and its member states.” In this case, member states will be allowed to detain all asylum seekers at their borders.

This is Orwellian Newspeak, which turns reality on its head. In fact, it is the EU that is “instrumentalising” refugees in several ways and with murderous consequences. Following their destruction of entire countries with their neocolonial wars in Africa and the Middle East, the leading European NATO powers and the US have decided to let refugees die in order to deter others and keep them away from “Fortress Europe.” According to official figures, over 28,000 people have drowned in the Mediterranean since 2014 alone. This year has been the deadliest since 2020, with more than 2,500 deaths.

Now, the same European governments that cynically justified past wars as “humanitarian” interventions are organising an even bigger bloodbath. They are escalating the NATO war offensive against Russia in Ukraine, which has already cost hundreds of thousands of lives. And in the Middle East they openly support Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians and are preparing a wider war against Iran and its allies, which will turn the entire region into an inferno.

The terror against refugees and the escalation of war are directly linked. The more aggressively the ruling classes pursue their imperialist war aims and push ahead with the associated social austerity, the more they rely on dictatorship and fascism to suppress the growing social and political opposition at home. With their incessant agitation, the politicians and the media seek to make refugees and immigrants the scapegoats for the deep social crisis, while strengthening the extreme right.

The attacks on refugees are only the spearhead of a comprehensive attack on the democratic rights of the entire working class. In recent weeks, efforts have been made throughout Europe to suppress the mass protests against the genocide in Gaza. In Germany, in particular, this process is well advanced: Bans on demonstrations, attacks on critical artists, brutal police operations against students at universities and raids on left-wing groups are now part of the daily routine.

The reactionary offensive is being driven by the nominally “left” and liberal parties, in particular.

In Germany, the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens in the government are organising the pro-war, authoritarian offensive and celebrating the tightening of asylum laws. “We are thus limiting irregular migration and relieving the burden on

countries that are particularly hard hit—including Germany,” wrote Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) on X/Twitter. The agreement was a “very important decision,” he said.

Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock also welcomed the agreement, issuing a statement that described the deal as “urgently needed and long overdue.”

In France, President Emmanuel Macron has effectively formed a coalition with Marine Le Pen’s far-right Rassemblement National to push one of the EU’s toughest immigration laws through parliament. The measures adopted are racist through and through. The law blocks immigrants’ access to social benefits for five years, and even young people born and raised in France will no longer automatically receive French citizenship at the age of 18.

The European pseudo-left is paving the way for this policy. For example, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) reform was drafted under the leadership of the Spanish PSOE/Sumar coalition, which currently holds the European Council presidency and continues to be supported by the pseudo-left Podemos.

In many respects, Madrid, Berlin and Brussels used the pseudo-left Syriza government in Greece as a model. Syriza massively tightened immigration policy between 2015 and 2019 in alliance with the far-right Independent Greeks (Anel), and introduced measures similar to those now being implemented by the EU. These included cramming refugees into concentration camp-like “hotspots,” such as Moria, illegal push-backs, and the use of the military against migrants in the Aegean Sea.

The European asylum deal, which is to be finally adopted before the European elections, held from June 6–9, 2024, threatens millions, but it also creates clarity. The fact that all sections of the ruling class support a policy of terror against refugees shows that workers and young people are confronted not simply with one or another government, but with the entire ruling class and its social system.

European capitalism cannot be reformed. It must be abolished by a revolutionary movement of the European working class and replaced by the United Socialist States of Europe.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and its sister organisations across Europe will use the European election campaign to arm the growing protests and strikes by European workers with an international socialist programme, and build the Fourth International across the continent and globally as the new political leadership. Only in this way can democratic rights be defended, war and genocide stopped and capitalist barbarism ended.



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