

# Germany's Christian Democrats whip up hatred against Syrian refugees

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Since Chancellor Friedrich Merz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) declared immigrants to be a problem for Germany's "urban environment," the agitation against refugees by the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) has taken ever more repulsive forms. Even Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul, a right-wing CDU politician and loyal follower of Merz, has not been spared.

After visiting the uninhabitable fields of ruins that stretch for kilometres on the outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus, the foreign minister stated the obvious: he had personally never seen such a great extent of destruction. In the short term, refugees could not return here, "Hardly any people can truly live here in dignity," said Wadephul.

Within the CDU/CSU this triggered a storm of indignation. Leading party figures reaffirmed their determination to deport Syrian refugees living in Germany back to this uninhabitable hell as quickly as possible.

The Syrian civil war was over, and for most Syrians who had left the country, returning to wide parts of the country was reasonable, Bundestag (parliament) deputy faction leader Günter Krings told the tabloid *Bild*. The degree of destruction of a country was no argument against a "voluntary or compulsory return."

The CDU state chairman and economics minister of Saxony-Anhalt, Sven Schulze, demanded a strategy for the swift return of people. "A country partly destroyed and in worse living conditions than Germany" were not good reasons. Parliamentary group leader Jens Spahn declared that it was the "patriotic duty" of Syrian refugees to help rebuild their homeland.

Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt (CSU) announced that his ministry was negotiating with the regime in Damascus about agreements "that will enable

returns to Syria." This mandate arose from the coalition agreement and would be implemented accordingly. The Interior Ministry has already decided not to allow "exploratory trips" by refugees to Syria. If they visit their former homeland to assess the situation, they risk not being allowed to return to Germany.

Chancellor Merz also spoke out in favour of a rapid return of Syrian refugees. The civil war in Syria was over, he said. "There are now absolutely no more reasons for asylum in Germany, and therefore we can begin with returns." He was counting on a large proportion of refugees returning to Syria of their own accord and taking part in reconstruction. "Those in Germany who then refuse to return to the country, we can of course continue to deport in the future," he added.

Foreign Minister Wadephul had met with the new Syrian ruler Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus. Now the chancellor has invited al-Sharaa to Berlin to discuss the deportation of Syrian criminals. This is even though al-Sharaa's Islamist HTS militia, a branch of Al Qaeda, continues to act against political opponents and Alawite and Druze minorities, and even though the interim president has no democratic legitimacy. Israel also continues repeatedly to bomb targets in Syria.

On Tuesday, Wadephul met for a discussion with the CDU/CSU parliamentary group. According to participants, he assured the deputies that he was no "weakling" and supported returns to Syria. But because he refused to retract his comment about the undignified living conditions in the country and added that the destruction in Syria was worse than in Germany after the Second World War, the attacks upon him became even more shrill.

"Behind closed doors, the first ones are calling for Wadephul's resignation," newsweekly *Der*

*Spiegel* reported. Faction leader Jens Spahn indirectly accused the foreign minister of damaging the image of the coalition.

For the 950,000 people from Syria currently living in Germany, the CDU/CSU agitation means existential insecurity and physical danger. A relatively high proportion of them, a total of 226,000, are employed and have a regular income; they pay taxes and social insurance contributions.

In some areas, their deportation would have severe consequences. For example, around 7,000 Syrian doctors work in Germany, most of them in hospitals. Including naturalised Syrians, the number is up to 15,000. A further 80,000 Syrians work in so-called shortage occupations—posts that are particularly difficult to fill.

However, the agitation is not aimed solely at refugees and immigrants but also serves domestic political goals. It strengthens the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and shifts the axis of the entire official political establishment ever further to the right.

The German government knows that its war policy, the enormous expenditures on rearmament, the related social cuts, the wave of job losses in export industries and the widening gap between rich and poor are encountering growing resistance. Despite one trillion in additional loans for armaments and military-related infrastructure, the federal budget already has a shortfall of €170 billion up to 2029, which Finance Minister and SPD leader Lars Klingbeil intends to close through social cuts.

In the summer, Chancellor Merz had announced: “We can no longer afford the welfare state.” Business associations are pushing for drastic cuts in healthcare and pensions. In its latest report on the economic situation in Europe, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) demands radical measures to defuse the explosive debt crisis: pensions, healthcare and many other state benefits are in the medium and long term no longer financially viable in their current form. Such measures, says the IMF, would probably face fierce resistance within the population.

Agitation against refugees turns them into scapegoats for the social crisis and at the same time strengthens the far-right forces that are needed to intimidate and suppress popular resistance. Donald Trump uses the same methods in the US.

The SPD and the Left Party play a particularly perfidious role in this shift to the right. While sometimes criticising openly racist statements by the CDU and verbally distancing themselves from the AfD, in all decisive questions they support its refugee, war and austerity policies.

As part of the governing coalition with the Christian Democrats, the SPD bears full responsibility for the right-wing course of Merz and Dobrindt. Holding the defence and finance ministries, the SPD leads the two decisive portfolios responsible for rearmament and social cuts.

The Left Party serves as a lightning rod for the Merz-Klingbeil-Dobrindt coalition. With its votes, it not only enabled the approval of war credits in the Bundesrat (upper chamber of parliament) and the rapid election of Merz as Chancellor, it fully supports the government’s deportation policy and social cuts in the federal states and municipalities.

Workers must not allow themselves to be divided. They must unconditionally defend refugees and immigrants against deportation and right-wing incitement. Only in this way can they defend their own democratic and social rights.



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