

Europe's governments plot abrogation of immigrant rights

Jordan Shilton
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Discussions began on Wednesday in Strasbourg among representatives of Europe's governments on abandoning key provisions in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

From Social Democrats to fascist parties, all are pushing towards an agreement by the spring of 2026 that will spell the end of any commitment to the universalist principles proclaimed in the ECHR in the immediate aftermath of the horrific crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Nazis during World War II.

Underlining the unanimity within the political establishment, the talks were initiated by Denmark's Social Democratic Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Italy's fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Melloni. In May, the pair issued an open letter—signed by seven additional European Union (EU) member states—that denounced the European Court of Human Rights for interfering with national political decisions and demanded freedom from the restraints of the ECHR.

In a manner little different from the Trump administration's recent declaration that Europe faces "civilisational erasure" due to "illegal" migration, the open letter railed against "criminal foreigners" and "hostile states" seeking to "instrumentalise" immigrants against Europe.

The letter is one expression of a decisive shift by Europe's ruling class to break with the constraints of international law as it seeks to ruthlessly assert its interests against the working class and its imperialist rivals. Its pursuit of a massive rearmament programme to enable European imperialism to fight its global competitors, and support for Israel's genocide of the Palestinians and bloody war between Ukraine and Russia, underscore the criminal character of this agenda. It demands an unrestrained onslaught on the living standards and rights of the working class, of which immigrants are a key component.

EU immigration ministers agreed on a package of measures on December 8 to accelerate mass deportations and facilitate the creation of concentration camps for migrants in authoritarian countries not subject to European law. The measures included a significant expansion to the list of "safe third countries" where EU members can dispatch refugees, and approval for the building of "return hubs" outside the EU's borders to process asylum claims.

In Germany, Chancellor Friedrich Merz's coalition government is implementing the migration policies of the fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), like its Social Democrat-led predecessor. Earlier this year, Merz won the enthusiastic backing of the fascist right when he declared in explicitly racist terms that Germany's "cityscapes" had become unrecognisable due to mass migration.

Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt blustered in the manner of the AfD following the EU agreement, "Over the past 10 years, illegal immigration has brought disorder to Europe. Together with our European partners, we are now bringing order back to European immigration policy." Summing up his goals, Dobrindt declared, "Strong borders, rapid repatriations, innovative deportation centres."

In Britain, Keir Starmer's right-wing Labour government invoked Denmark as a model last month when it presented a far-right immigration plan. Labour's goals are to abolish rights extended under the ECHR, including the right to a family life, and right to protection against torture and degrading treatment, and to massively increase deportations.

Europe's governments have long pursued vicious anti-immigrant policies to establish "Fortress Europe." These find their most murderous expression in the Mediterranean, which has become a mass grave for thousands of people due to the blocking of all legal routes to reach the continent and prohibitions on sea rescues.

According to the Missing Migrants Project by the International Organisation for Migration, some 33,220 migrants have been recorded as missing in the Mediterranean since the project began in 2014. The total for 2025 is approaching 2,000.

However, the present turn marks something new, with governments of all political stripes breaking explicitly with even the semblance of international law. They openly declare that the basic democratic rights the bourgeoisie was forced to grant in a previous period due to the horrors of World War II are no longer appropriate and must be abrogated from national and international legal systems. At the same time, political parties in all the major European countries are working systematically to integrate fascist forces into power, a process they have already achieved in Italy and the Czech Republic.

As politics across the continent has lurched sharply to the right, the European Court of Human Rights—set up in 1959 to enforce the rights contained in the ECHR—has remained one of the few venues in which migrants, political dissidents, and other persecuted minorities at least have the possibility of challenging state repression and the systematic violation of their rights.

For example, the Court found in October 2024 that Germany and Greece violated EU law by imposing automatic removals on asylum seekers without giving them the opportunity to pursue legal remedies that were open to them. The specific case concerned an individual, H.T., who was forcibly removed by German authorities to Greece, where they were detained in inhumane conditions in one of the country's notorious concentration camps for refugees. The Court found both countries in violation of Article 3 of the ECHR, the right to protection against inhumane or degrading treatment.

In July 2025, the Court accepted a complaint by Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotyuk, who was detained by the imperialist-backed Zelensky regime in April 2024 and charged with “high treason under martial law.” The complaint argues that Bogdan, a leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, represented a danger to society because he opposes the present war, and both the Zelensky and Putin regimes, and fights for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers in the struggle against imperialist war.

The attacks on the working class planned by governments across the continent in the coming years to make European imperialism “war-ready” are so sweeping that no opposition can be tolerated, even when expressed through the highly managed framework of bourgeois

legality. In Germany, an all-party coalition has approved €1 trillion in war spending, which must now be squeezed out of the working class through the destruction of public spending and social programs, summed up in the declaration by Merz that the current welfare system is no longer affordable. French President Emmanuel Macron is committed to tens of billions in spending cuts to fund a massive increase in the military budget.

EU member states have agreed to a shared €850 billion military spending programme, funded by austerity measures. In every country, thousands of workers are being thrown out of their jobs as civilian industry is converted to war production and the capitalists offload the deepening crisis produced by decaying capitalism onto the backs of the workers. The same ruthless methods perfected by the ruling class against immigrants and refugees, the most vulnerable sections of the working class, are now to be turned against all workers who try to resist this vicious class-war agenda.

The defence of immigrant rights, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has always insisted, is a central component of the defence of all worker rights. The fight for the political independence of the working class from the warmongering and nationalist bourgeois parties must uphold the unrestricted right of everyone to live and work in the country of their choice. It must struggle for the abolition of all immigration quotas, and discriminatory measures based on nationality and ethnicity.

The struggle against imperialist war and militarism requires a socialist and internationalist programme, aimed at the abolition of the obsolete nation-state borders and repudiation of nationalist tropes employed by ruling elites in every country to block working-class unity. Workers must build a mass political and industrial movement against war and capitalist austerity and make the words of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* their battle-cry: “Workers of the world, unite!”



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