

Sections of European social democrats vote with conservatives and far-right to pass anti-migrant policies

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On Tuesday, the European Parliament voted to revise its “Asylum Procedure Regulation” (APR) and create a list of “safe countries of origin”, paving the way for mass migrant deportations. The vote passed by a large majority of 224 (408 in favour, 184 against and 60 abstentions).

On the list are multiple countries run by repressive regimes known for massive violations of democratic rights: Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, India, Bangladesh, Colombia and Kosovo. European officials will be told to presume that nationals of the designated countries do not qualify for international protection, placing the burden on applicants to prove they would be unsafe.

Another vote approved, by a majority of 170, was a Return Border Procedure Regulation extending European governments’ ability to deport migrants to “safe third countries”. These “return hubs” are countries which the asylum applicant did not hail from, but to which they can be said to have a connection by one of the following criteria:

- the presence of members of their family in the country, the previous presence in the country of the applicant, or if there are linguistic, cultural or similar links;

- the applicant has transited through the third country on the way to the EU and they could have requested effective protection there;

- an agreement or arrangement exists with the third country at a bilateral, multilateral or EU level for the admission of asylum seekers, with the exception of unaccompanied minors.

The passage of the laws is the outcome of the EU’s adoption of the Migration and Asylum Pact (CEAS) in 2024. This included 10 articles aimed at establishing “a European solution” to prevent migration into the continent. It specified prioritising “more secure European borders”, “faster and more efficient procedures for asylum and return” and “more solidarity with Member States at external borders”. Critical to the Pact, and its planned full adoption by June this year, was the adoption this month of a harsher Asylum Procedure Regulation and Return Border Procedure Regulation.

The measures adopted last week represent a significant strengthening of the Fortress Europe agenda of the European ruling elite, as they accept, continent-wide, the model established by Georgia Meloni’s far-right Italian government, under which Albania hosts two detention camps in its territory to hold migrants while their claims for asylum are processed in Italy. Migrants bound for Italy intercepted at sea are transferred to these camps, which are expected to hold up to 3,000 people a month.

Alessandro Ciriani, an MEP and member of Meloni’s Brothers of Italy party, hailed the votes in the European Parliament: “This is the beginning of a new phase: migration is no longer endured but governed.”

Another precedent was set by the Dutch government, which agreed with the Ugandan administration that migrants from neighbouring African countries who could not be deported directly to them from the Netherlands would be held in Uganda in the meantime. A September statement by a Dutch government then led by right-wing caretaker government, which included far-right forces, said the agreement demonstrated that “it is

a pioneer in Europe when it comes to innovative solutions for getting migration under control.”

Conservative and far-right parties now comprise a majority in the European Parliament—the result of successive betrayals and social attacks on the working class mounted by social democratic and pseudo-left parties across the continents, including most prominently Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Such is the lurch to the right among these “centre-left” parties that many back anti-immigration policies previously associated only with the far-right.

Although the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) bloc—with 136 seats in the 720 seat parliament—was officially opposed, there were significant defections and abstentions. The anti-migrant measures were supported by social-democratic deputies from four countries (Denmark, Malta, Romania and Sweden), with 25 voting in favour. This was only the latest step taken by each in their attacks on migrants and the right to asylum.

In Denmark, Social Democratic Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen initiated talks last May with Meloni, backed by seven other (EU) member states, aimed at abandoning key provisions in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). In July, Denmark took over the six-month rotating presidency of the European Union Council and pushed the anti-immigration agenda culminating in last week’s European Parliament vote.

Frederiksen has followed in the footsteps of previous Danish governments who have cracked down on immigration, pioneering policies aimed at deterring asylum seekers, including plans for external processing arrangements outside Europe. Britain is no longer represented in the EU parliament since Brexit but Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer cites Denmark as his model in implementing “border control”.

In Sweden, the Social Democratic Party has presided over a sharp tightening of asylum law following the 2015 refugee crisis, introducing temporary residence permits and border controls.

While not in power since 2022, they have continued advocating for harsher migration policies, demanding mandatory Swedish language proficiency for employment in public services or for obtaining citizenship. Another policy the party plans to stand on in the upcoming September legislative elections is to abolish a law allowing migrants to choose where they

live.

In Romania, the Social Democratic Party (PSD), a continuator of Romania’s Stalinist ruling party in the Cold War era, has long functioned as a pro-EU, pro-NATO formation backing austerity policies. It currently governs in coalition with the conservative National Liberal Party (PNL).

The PSD stood on an election manifesto in 2024 demanding stronger border security, including stepping up surveillance capabilities at Romania’s land borders and in the Black Sea.

In Malta, successive Labour governments have overseen aggressive maritime interception practices in the central Mediterranean, working with Libyan forces. This has been implemented as part of the broader Fortress Europe regime aimed at militarising the EU’s borders against migrants.

In 2022, the Labour Party won a third successive election and has since imposed a raft of anti-immigration policies, including ramped-up immigration raids throughout 2024-25, inspecting vehicles and workplaces to locate and detain irregular migrants and transfer them to detention centres.

In November, the party government hosted a meeting of home affairs ministers from Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta aimed at improving relations with “countries of origin”. Maltese Home Affairs Minister Byron Camilleri declared, “If you deserve asylum, you will get it. If not, then you will be sent back.”

Thousands of migrants already die at Europe’s external borders every year—especially in the Mediterranean, with 2024 the worst year on record for deaths in the sea. Thousands more died in 2025, but this year could be the most horrific yet.

In just 40 days to February 10, at least 524 migrants have died or been reported missing attempting the crossing from North Africa to Europe. Speaking to *La Monde*, an International Organization for Migration spokesman warned, after 53 people died in a sinking off the Libyan coast, “This is the worst start to a year we have seen in over a decade... Also the deadliest.”



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