

New EU Return Regulation: attacks on democratic right and mass expulsions

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The European Parliament and EU member states have agreed to a new return regulation, planned to come into force as early as 12 June together with the EU asylum reform adopted in May 2024.

It opens the floodgates for attacks on democratic rights and mass expulsions in two respects.

Firstly, it is a further blow against the right to asylum, as it emerged after the Second World War in response to the Holocaust and refugee flows of millions. Fundamental democratic and human rights are now being abolished. Those fleeing—including their children—are no longer considered human beings with inalienable rights, but outlaws who can be locked up, deported and expelled to third countries against their will.

Secondly, with the new return regulation, the so-called “firewall” against collaborating with the fascists and right-wing radicals has finally fallen. The regulation was drafted in close coordination between the conservative EPP group and the three extreme right-wing groups in the European Parliament, which provided the necessary majority.

EPP group leader Manfred Weber and German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt, both of whom belong to the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), pulled the strings. As the dpa news agency revealed, the agreements were worked out in online chat groups and personal meetings of Members of Parliament. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) was also involved in this.

The new regulation is aimed at accelerating the deportation of asylum seekers. To this end, negative asylum decisions will be mutually recognised EU-wide and can be executed by any member state. If, for example, an authority in notoriously restrictive Poland or Hungary decides to reject an asylum seeker, the German police can deport them from Germany without their having any legal means of appeal.

Welfare benefits for those obliged to leave the country will be uniformly cut across Europe if they do not cooperate in their own deportation. If an official suspects a risk of absconding, those obliged to leave can be detained for up to 24 months, and in special cases up to 30 months.

At the centre of the regulation is the establishment of deportation centres in third countries. Rejected asylum seekers who cannot be returned to their home country, either because it refuses to accept them or does not maintain diplomatic relations with EU members, are to be deported to these “return hubs.” They are to remain in these internment camps either permanently or until they return to their country of origin. This also applies to families with children.

So far, there are no corresponding agreements with third countries willing to receive them. But German Interior Minister Dobrindt has announced, in collaboration with other EU states—including Austria, Denmark and Greece—he will strive to conclude agreements by the end of the year. Countries such as Rwanda, Libya, Mauritania, Uzbekistan and Ethiopia are under discussion, where either civil war prevails or authoritarian regimes are in power.

The significance both of the new return regulation and the role of fascists in enacting it goes far beyond refugees. They open the floodgates for a general attack on all democratic rights. If these no longer apply to one social group, others will be next: young people who reject conscription and militarism; workers who defend themselves against dismissals and wage cuts; tenants who protest against unaffordable housing.

The diversion of hundreds of billions of euros into war and rearmament, the associated frontal attack on education, healthcare, pensions and social benefits, the bloodletting in the car and metal industries, where over 10,000 jobs are destroyed every month, as well as rising prices and rents, are putting fierce class struggles on the agenda. This is the reason why the ruling class is reaching out to the fascists—it needs them to intimidate and suppress the growing opposition.

In many European countries, extreme right-wing parties are on the advance: the National Rally (RN) in France, Reform UK in Britain, the AfD in Germany. In Italy, the fascist Giorgia Meloni has led the government for three and a half years, not least thanks to the active help of EPP head Manfred Weber, who supported her election. Meloni has

driven up the percentage of the Italy's population in absolute poverty to a record high of 9.8 percent and transformed the country into a tax haven for the super-rich. She systematically staffs the state apparatus of oppression, the universities and cultural institutions with fascist partisans.

The AfD pursues the same goal in Germany. It admires Donald Trump, the fascist real estate swindler who posed as an opponent of the establishment during the election campaign in order to serve the super rich and build an authoritarian police state as president. Trump's terror against migrants served as a model for the new EU regulation.

The call for the end of the “firewall”

It is significant that calls for an end to the “firewall” against governmental cooperation with the AfD are growing alongside the crisis in Germany. Eighty years after Hitler's fall, fascism is being normalised again.

Prominent politicians, business leaders and editorial writers are advocating this. The new chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), Wolfgang Kubicki, declared before his election: “I know of no firewall.” His general secretary Martin Hagen demanded an end to the “parliamentary ostracism of the AfD”.

In May, former State Premier of Schleswig-Holstein Torsten Albig became the first prominent Social Democrat to recommend that his party tear down the firewall. One could not pretend that the AfD was “the spawn of hell,” he said, and called on the SPD to accept minority governments propped up by the AfD.

Albig cited Denmark as a model, where the Social Democrats have cooperated with right-wing extremists to realise a right-wing, anti-refugee programme. Business daily *Handelsblatt* argued that instead of being outraged about Albig's comments, Germans should recognise that “the firewall against the AfD has failed politically.”

Ex-Siemens boss Joe Kaeser, one of the best-known German business leaders, described the term firewall as “terminologically wrong,” “extremely questionable” and a “dangerous mistake.”

Caspar Brockhaus, head of the Brockhaus Group, told *Bild am Sonntag*: “The firewall paralyses politics, the economy and thus our country.” The mere possibility of cooperating with the AfD “would significantly increase the pressure for reform,” he said, by which he meant austerity and deregulation.

Prominent German business association and lobbying organization Die Familienunternehmer (The Family Entrepreneurs), representing approximately 6,500 family-owned businesses across various industries, had already lifted its previous “ban on contact” with AfD Members of the Bundestag at the end of 2025. It opposed speaking about the AfD exclusively in the “categories of good or evil.”

Always at the forefront of a shift to the right, the conservative Springer press (Germany's equivalent of the Murdoch press, whose portfolio includes national newspapers like *Bild* and *Die Welt*), is campaigning for the normalisation of political cooperation with the AfD.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has proven for years, the “firewall” has not stopped the rise of the AfD, but only concealed the deliberate building up of this extreme right-wing party by the ruling class. For example, we wrote last year: “The support and integration of the AfD is fully in line with the policy of the federal government. It makes refugees and migrants scapegoats, deports people on a mass scale, cuts social spending at federal, state and municipal levels and is rearming on a scale not seen since Hitler.”

The adoption of its policies by the government has made the AfD a major political presence. Now it is needed as a party of government to enforce these policies against growing resistance from the population. That is the reason for the call to tear down the firewall.

If the government is still hesitating, then only because it fears explosive resistance. When Merz passed a motion on migration policy in the Bundestag in January 2025 with the support of the AfD, hundreds of thousands took to the streets against it.

This resistance must be developed. The struggle against the AfD is not a question of parliamentary arithmetic—it is a struggle of the working class for its social, democratic and physical necessities. No party of the bourgeois establishment can lead this struggle: It requires an independent, socialist movement that targets the causes of war and fascism—the capitalist system itself.



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