

DOWN WITH FORTRESS EUROPE - OPEN THE BORDERS NOW

The only humanitarian policy is to open Europe's borders and fight for resettlement under labour movement control, funded by taxing the rich

In Syria, the conflict between the Assad regime and Russia on the one hand and Turkey and its allies on the other threatens to escalate further - even a military confrontation between NATO and Russia seems possible.

But even if this escalation is avoided, the deliberate expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people by the Syrian regime and the struggle for the redivision of the country between imperialist powers like Russia and the USA and their regional allies or adversaries like Iran or Turkey has forced millions to flee.

Like millions before them, they have no choice but to go to Turkey; and like millions before them, they hope somehow make it to the EU. The opening of the borders by Erdogan - motivated solely by the desire to receive financial, political and possibly also military support from his European allies - appears to hundreds of thousands of displaced, impoverished, disenfranchised and traumatised people as an unexpected glimmer of hope.

Any sensible person can understand this only too well. In fact, the immediate measures to alleviate the humanitarian disaster, to improve the fate of millions of refugees would be very easy to implement. The EU, this self-proclaimed stronghold of humanity and human rights, should not only open the borders for the refugees - but also assist them with onward travel and resettlement within a country of their choice.

The new barbarism

While in 2015 public opinion in most EU countries was not yet ready to tolerate the deliberate drowning of refugees in the Mediterranean, in 2020 the goal of all EU governments is to prevent a new breach of Fortress Europe.

Greece and Bulgaria should be given more support - not to help the refugees crammed into filthy camps on Lesbos - but to deter them. Attacks on refugees and aid organisations by fascist groups have been stirred up by the Greek government in order to legitimise the policy of violent deterrence.

Official policy is now reaching a new level of escalation - with the support of all EU states. Right-wing populist or conservative governments like Austria's have announced plans to station soldiers at their own borders as a precautionary measure to stop those

who might make it to Central Europe via the Balkans.

In recent days Bulgaria and Greece have transferred thousands of additional police, border guards and soldiers to the land borders with Turkey to stop the refugees with tear gas and armed patrols.

In the Aegean, the Greek navy and army are mobilising. On some islands, the army is to carry out firing exercises, and the EU is sending reinforcements through Frontex. War is being waged against the refugees.

The shift to the right in Europe is seldom more evident than in the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and Turkey. Erdogan, of all people, is scolded for not wanting to stick to the inhuman deal to "dispose" of the Syrian refugees. He is denounced for blackmailing the EU.

Faced with Erdogan's threat to 'open the gates', the EU's leaders are determined to save the agreement, preferably by buying Erdogan off again, so Turkey can continue to function as a dumping ground for refugees from the Syrian civil war.

European politicians from the conservative and far right to the Greens and left reformists like to boast of their moral superiority over Erdogan. But their acceptance of the policy of deterrence by drowning at Europe's external borders exposes the abject hypocrisy.

No conservative, liberal, green or social democratic party wants to be accused of wanting to do "too much" for the refugees. The few proposals by individual cities such as Berlin to accept a few thousand people represent the "highest" of sentiments - limited humanitarian gestures, drops in the ocean that allow such city councils or individual politicians to wash their hands of the problem. Of course, they don't want to open the borders for everyone - to create "uncontrollable conditions" that hundreds of thousands of refugees would allegedly bring with them.

While Turkey, which is a much weaker economy, is criticised for not taking sufficient care of millions of refugees, the EU is determined to reject all those who do not meet the requirements for exploitation by European capital. At the same time that regulations for the employment of skilled workers from third countries have recently been relaxed by the EU in order to avoid labour shortages, the borders are becoming even tighter for refugees from

Syria.

Open borders now!

The example of the Left Party in Germany is typical of the mealy-mouthed approach taken by the reformists. It demands the cancellation of the deal with Erdogan and opposes sending troops - instead calling for "the establishment of safe escape routes, for example by granting humanitarian visas at EU embassies" and the provision of capacities "so that these people can be guaranteed a fair asylum procedure".

And where should people stay until they get a visa from an EU embassy? Should the decision on who is allowed to come be left to German, Italian or other EU officials? Should hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, wait until the EU provides the capacity for a "fair asylum procedure"?

There is only one humanitarian solution worthy of the name - the opening of the EU's borders, the reception of people in the EU member states of their choice, the creation and provision of housing, programmes for free medical and psychological care, education and training and jobs paid at collectively agreed wages.

In order to prevent capitalist governments and right-wing demagogues from playing the refugees off against wage earners - e.g. the unemployed, precariously employed or people in poverty in old age - it is a matter of fighting for work, minimum income, social benefits such as old-age provision for all - paid from taxation of profits and large fortunes.

Actions and mobilisations such as those of the anti-racist movements, like SeaWatch and other activists, show that there are forces that want to oppose the shift to the right and the sealing off of Fortress Europe. The Labour party, the trade unions, all organisations of the workers' movement, of migrants and of the radical left must now show solidarity with the fugitives - against the sealing off of the EU, for open borders - immediately!

- Open the borders!
- Disband Frontex!
- Safe travel and assistance for all refugees!
- For resettlement under the control of trade union and refugee organisations!