

# Podemos helps strengthen “Fortress Europe” against migrants in Spain

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On March 18, the European Union (EU) struck a deal in Brussels with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to make way for the mass deportation of refugees arriving in Greece to Turkey.

The agreement aims to seal off Europe’s borders to the millions of desperate people fleeing the social misery produced by a series of wars and military interventions led by the imperialist powers. It is a flagrant violation of international law, leaving the refugees at the mercy of the Turkish government for which it will receive up to €6 billion in financial assistance and fast-tracking of its request to join the EU.

When the draft EU-Turkey agreement was first debated in the Spanish Congress, on March 11, Socialist Party (PSOE) leader Pedro Sánchez called it a “pact of shame” that was “immoral” and “illegal” while pseudo-left Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias tweeted that he felt “ashamed of the EU, which systematically is not respecting human rights.”

A spokesperson for the right-wing Ciudadanos (Citizens) party, Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez, said the agreement was “a symptom of weakness” because it was “subcontracting” EU authority to Turkey. The leader of the Stalinist United Left (IU), Cayo Lara, echoed the approach of Citizens, stating that the refugee crisis was the result of the EU being “subordinated” to US geostrategic interests in the Middle East and that it “must start having its own and sovereign policies.”

As a result, the draft agreement was defeated, jeopardising the whole EU-Turkey negotiations, which required the approval of all 28 EU member states. Only the Popular Party (PP) led by caretaker Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, voted in favour.

However, just five days later, on March 16, Rajoy

was able to get the unanimous approval of Congress to an 11-point joint declaration. Under the fig leaf of humanitarian concern, the “expulsion” of refugees to Turkey was approved. The only caveat was that deportations should be delayed until any application for asylum a refugee may make has been processed.

The first two points of the declaration read:

“1. We manifest our opposition to the adoption of any agreement with Turkey that expressly or indirectly establishes the possibility of proceeding with collective expulsions to Turkish territory, or to any non-member state of the European Union.

“2. We consider it essential that the declaration or agreement expressly guarantee that any expulsion to Turkey will only be possible when it is adopted following the definitive outcome of the corresponding individual asylum file with all guarantees.”

Spain’s acting PP Foreign Minister José Manuel García-Margallo declared, “Anyone arriving on European territory must have the right to individualized attention, to file an asylum request that will be taken into consideration, and the right to appeal if the request is denied.”

This is the height of hypocrisy. Since the Syrian refugee crisis erupted, the PP government has stepped up its attempts to seal the country off from asylum seekers. In 2015, less than half of those who applied for asylum in Spain had their applications accepted. Of the 14,000 that Rajoy announced the country would accept in September 2015, only 18 have arrived, according to the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid.

Congress not only ratified the “expulsion” of refugees, but it also demanded the EU “communitise” its migration policy, make it binding on all member states and “develop” the European Asylum System. In other words, it was a demand, signed by Podemos, for

the EU to beef up its “Fortress Europe” policy.

In the event, the final EU-Turkey deal statement included the PSOE-Podemos-IU fig leaf saying that “migrants arriving in the Greek islands will be duly registered and any application for asylum will be processed individually ... thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion.”

Hypocritical talk from Spain’s politicians about human rights and respect for international law is a cover for the defence of the national interest of the Spanish bourgeoisie. A major concern of the ruling elite over the EU-Turkey deal is that the closure of the Balkan route will encourage more sea crossings from North Africa to Spain and increase pressure on the country’s African enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla, in Morocco. The EU’s foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, has warned that there are already nearly half a million displaced people in neighbouring Libya.

The model on which the EU is basing its mass expulsion policy with Turkey is in fact inspired by the decade-long close collaboration of the Spanish and Moroccan authorities. Spain gives Morocco benefits and political support in exchange for keeping migrants and refugees from crossing the borders into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Africa on the Moroccan coast, and making the sea journey across the Strait of Gibraltar. This is enforced by systematic violations of the migrants’ rights, according to a wide range of NGOs including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The Open Migration organisation points out in its February 29 report, “A political laboratory: how Spain closed the borders to refugees,” that of the 1 million sea arrivals in Europe in 2015, only a few thousand occurred in Spain. Out of the 1.3 million asylum applications made, only 13,000 were lodged in the country, despite the fact that Spain is the only EU member that has territory in Africa.

The report describes how Spain has become “a political and technological laboratory for border surveillance.” The Integrated External Surveillance System (Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior, SIVE) introduced in 2000 has expanded into “a complex control apparatus, constantly processing data received from boat radars operating in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, video feed from watch posts along the coast, satellite and aerial signals.” As a

result, barely a few hundred boat people now reach the Canary Islands, compared to 30,000 or more in 2006.

According to the EU border agency Frontex, it was also the “very good operational cooperation, between Spain, Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco” that “significantly reduced the pressure on the route towards the Canary Islands and south of Spain.”

The PSOE government that was in power from 2004 to 2011 under José Luis Zapatero was responsible for these measures. It turned Ceuta and Melilla into what Open Migration describes as “the symbol of exclusion” surrounded by kilometres-long six-metre high razor wire fences, watch towers, CCTV, spotlights, noise and movement sensors, patrolled by police, drones and satellites.

The treatment being meted out to refugees has exposed the role of Podemos and the IU. They make no criticism of the savage anti-migrant record of PSOE as they plead with Sánchez to form a “left coalition” administration with them. The country has been without a government since the December election produced a stalemate.

Both parties continue to sow illusions that the EU can be democratised to serve citizens’ interests, rather than being a mechanism for the subjugation of the continent to the dictates of the financial markets, a forum in which competing states fight among themselves and jointly perpetrate a social counterrevolution against the working class.

Likewise, they have remained completely silent in regards to the Greek government’s role, led by their pseudo-left ally Syriza, as guardians of “Fortress Europe.” There is no question that both would carry out the same policies should they come to power.



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