

On World Refugee Day: German chancellor and state premiers discuss measures to increase deportations

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The most recent decisions made in Berlin and Brussels to outsource asylum procedures to regimes outside the European Union are aimed at forcing refugees hoping for a better future in Europe back to countries where they face war, violence, poverty and even death.

When the crew of the *Nadir* received a call for help on Monday night, June 17, they had no idea of the gruesome scene they would encounter. That night, the sea rescuers were able to save 51 half-drowned, exhausted people from an overloaded wooden boat drifting south of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean.

On the lower deck they discovered the bodies of 10 young men. They had drowned in the overloaded hull, stunned by toxic petrol fumes. Two unconscious men, severely hypothermic and dehydrated, were stabilised and rescued, together with the other survivors.

The crew and their motor sailer *Nadir* belong to the rescue organisation RESQSHIP e.V. Their motto is “Protect people—not the borders.”

The heads of German state governments who met with Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) in Berlin on June 20 are pursuing opposite goals. On the agenda was a discussion about measures allowing federal states to also deport refugees to Afghanistan and Syria in future. The main topic of the meeting was the outsourcing of asylum procedures to regimes outside the EU. The official motto, “Curbing irregular migration,” in plain speech means: “Let’s hand over those seeking protection to their executioners!”

The state premiers were presented with a report by the German government that focused in particular on the potential outsourcing of asylum procedures based on the British model (to Rwanda) or the Italian model (to Albania). The report comes to the highly questionable conclusion that such inhumane projects are extremely expensive and lengthy, but legally possible (!), provided the EU creates the appropriate rules.

“Out of sight, out of mind,” commented *Der Spiegel*. “It

seems to be all about how Germany can get rid of all unwanted people in need of help. There is hardly any talk about integration, language courses and professional qualifications. Instead, discussion centres on how Germany can organise more deportations and ideally keep new asylum seekers at bay. The solution is supposed to be simple—asylum procedures far beyond our borders.”

More than 300 organisations, including PRO ASYL and numerous refugee associations and sea rescuers, Doctors Without Borders, the Joint General Association, Bread for the World, VVN, Amnesty as well as trade unions and church associations, protested against the meeting in Berlin, in an open letter.

According to the letter, such a blanket deportation of refugees would “lead to serious human rights violations.” The letter refers to “the misery on Greek islands as a result of the EU-Turkey declaration.” The inhumane treatment of refugees by the Greek government and coastguard is well documented.

A recent BBC investigation on the subject is based on numerous witness accounts. According to these accounts, the Greek coastguard not only condoned the drowning deaths of dozens of migrants, including children, over a period of three years, but deliberately caused them. For example, according to reports from refugees, at least nine people were deliberately thrown into the water on the high seas.

In total, at least 43 people apparently died because members of the Greek coastguard forced them out of their country’s territorial waters, sometimes at gunpoint.

In total, the researchers analysed 15 incidents between 2020 and 2023 for the documentary *Dead Calm: Killing in the Med?* In five of the cases, the migrants stated that Greek officials had thrown them directly into the sea. In four of the cases, they explained that they had landed on Greek islands but were then forced to leave. In several other incidents, the refugees reported that they had been abandoned on rubber dinghies without engines, which were then deflated or even

deliberately punctured.

The following report was given by a Cameroonian who landed on the island of Samos in September 2021 and was arrested immediately after his arrival. He said: “As soon as we had docked, police came from behind. There were two policemen dressed in black and three others in plain clothes. They were masked, you could only see their eyes.” Together with a second Cameroonian and a man from the Ivory Coast, he was quickly taken onto a coastguard boat. Taken out to sea, they were pushed overboard.

He continued: “They started with the Cameroonian. They threw him into the water. The Ivorian screamed: ‘Help, I don’t want to die,’ but soon only his hand was visible as his body sank into the water. Slowly, the hand also disappeared and the water swallowed him whole.”

The eyewitness was then forced into the water with brutal blows—“Blows were raining down on my head. It was as if they were beating an animal”—but he was able to swim and reach the Turkish shore, where the bodies of the two other victims were also recovered. They were identified as Sidy Keita and Didier Martial Kouamou Nana.

The Greek coastguard has denied all allegations of illegal pushbacks. But a former senior coastguard officer, who was shown the dramatic footage, said in an unguarded moment (when he was unaware that his microphone was still switched on) that these were “obviously illegal” practices, an “international crime.”

In Greek, he said to an attendant, “I didn’t tell them much, right? That’s quite clear, isn’t it? After all, it’s not nuclear physics. I don’t know why they did this in broad daylight. It’s ... obviously illegal. It’s an international crime.”

However, the crimes cannot be blamed solely on the Greek coastguard or its government. They are the deliberate policy of the EU, largely determined by the German government. According to all pertaining law, “pushbacks” and “pullbacks” are highly illegal, but in reality, pushing back and handing over migrants is common practice. It is part of the “strategic partnerships to curb irregular migration.”

German and EU politicians have been working towards such measures for months. They include German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who are working closely with far-right Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. They have visited one authoritarian regime after another to recruit them as territorial bouncers and prison guards. Huge sums of money are being channelled from Brussels and Berlin to strengthen the respective security apparatuses of these countries.

In addition to Turkey, the countries with which the EU has concluded “migration pacts” include Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Lebanon and even

Libya. The EU has not shied away from providing the Libyan coastguard with financial support for a long time, even though its methods have been labelled war crimes by UN observers and its detention camps are considered to be “similar to concentration camps.”

Tunisia is also an EU partner that receives money for its services as a brutal doorkeeper. It is known that Tunisian security forces abduct migrants to the Libyan border and abandon them in the middle of the desert without food or water. The picture of 30-year-old Matyla Dosso and her six-year-old daughter Marie, who died this way, circulated around the world a year ago.

None of these murderous crimes prevent German and European politicians from concluding yet more deals, which will not stop migration, but only result in ever more dangerous and deadly escape routes being taken.

Shortly before state elections in Thuringia, Saxony and Brandenburg, all parties, including the Left Party in Thuringia, adopted the deportation and refugee programme of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). On June 20, of all days, World Refugee Day, politicians from Germany’s federal and state governments discussed how they could deport refugees even more effectively and keep them out of Germany.

The 10 people who died on the *Nadir* Monday night are just some of the hundreds who have paid with their lives for the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean in recent months. According to the UNHCR, at least 3,760 people drowned or went missing in the Mediterranean in 2023 alone. In addition, at least 868 people died or have since gone missing on the even more dangerous Atlantic route last year.

Together, that is 4,628 people killed or missing, or almost 13 a day. “The number of dead and missing can only be estimated and the exact number of victims will forever remain in the dark,” writes the UNHCR.



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