

# After the migration pact: EU states outdo each other with anti-refugee policies

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The adoption of the so-called “migration pact” in April has prompted the European Union and leading EU states to escalate their anti-refugee and anti-migrant policies and attack the democratic rights of workers across the board. While the Italian government under the fascist Giorgia Meloni is acting as a spearhead in some respects, a race has long since broken out among the European powers to see who is taking the toughest and most criminal actions against migrants.

At an extraordinary special meeting on Tuesday evening in Rome, the Italian cabinet issued a decree that enshrines in law the government’s definition of “safe” countries of origin and which comes into force immediately. The Meloni government is thus overruling a court judgement that declared the transfer of refugees to Albania to be unlawful. In future, Italy will operate two large detention centres on Albanian territory where asylum seekers will be held under inhumane conditions.

In this way, Italian officials are to decide on up to 36,000 asylum applications per year “in a fast-track procedure” outside the EU. Those who are rejected are to be deported from Albania. An article in *Der Spiegel* describes the project as “Meloni’s mini-Guantánamo” and states that many EU states regard the measure as a “role model.” Alongside the US torture prison in Cuba, the concentration camp-like conditions of refugee centres such as Moria (Greece) are likely to serve as a model that could soon prevail everywhere at Europe’s external borders.

A few days earlier, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democrat, CDU), who works closely with Meloni at EU level, announced a new draft law on the deportation of migrants. According to *Der Spiegel*, the planned proposal from Brussels is intended to “effectively streamline the return process” and aims to “ensure that every EU country recognises the decision on deportation in another member state.” This requires a “new legal framework in the EU to improve our ability to act.” Von der Leyen went on to explain that, in addition to existing migration agreements with Tunisia, Libya and Turkey, the EU was seeking further similar “partnerships” with West African states such as Mauritania, Mali and Senegal.

Meanwhile, European governments are outdoing each other with reactionary moves against refugees and democratic rights.

According to an article in *Le Monde*, the far-right French government recently appointed by President Emmanuel Macron is seeking a new law that would allow refugees to be detained for up to 210 days instead of the current 90 days. The government under Prime Minister Michel Barnier and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau also announced this week that border controls with Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy and Switzerland would be extended until at least April 30, 2025. Similar border controls within the Schengen area were recently reintroduced by Germany, Austria, Norway and Denmark.

Meanwhile, the Polish government under former EU Council President Donald Tusk is taking even tougher action against immigrants than its predecessor government of the PiS party. It recently authorised the use of firearms in certain cases of “irregular” border crossings. Tusk also announced a “temporary territorial suspension of the right of asylum,” particularly with regard to Belarus and Russia. The plans are a clear violation of international and European treaties and the Polish constitution.

In the style of an exemplary fascist, Tusk declared, “We are fortifying the border and when it comes to illegal migration, I will be absolutely tough and ruthless, even if I get beaten up for it, and will not recognise and implement any European ideas that endanger our security. I am talking about the migration pact here, no one will force me to do so.”

In fact, brutal and illegal measures such as those announced by Tusk form the very essence of the so-called migration pact and are its desired outcome. In an article on the adoption of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote:

With the final adoption of the CEAS on April 10, the European Parliament has effectively suspended the right to asylum and turned the immigration policies of the extreme right into law. The measures adopted provide for Europe’s external borders to be hermetically sealed off. This means that refugees will have to undergo their asylum procedure outside the EU in closed, militarily guarded detention centres.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democrat, SPD) boasted that Germany would lead the way in implementing the migration pact and announced a “security package” of new legislative proposals, including additional powers for security authorities and stricter rules on residency rights. In addition, refugees who are required to leave the country and have already been registered in another EU country will have their social benefits cancelled in the future.

At the weekend, Chancellor Olaf Scholz travelled to Istanbul to negotiate accelerated returns with Turkish President Recep Erdoğan in exchange for further arms deliveries. Since 2016, there has been an informal agreement between the EU and Turkey to prevent refugees in Turkey from travelling to Europe. Most recently, the Turkish government deported 50,000 refugees back to Syria. Following the meeting, Erdoğan signalled that he was “open” to shielding the EU states from refugees from Lebanon as well.

Back in September, Scholz and Kenyan President William Ruto signed another comprehensive migration deal in Berlin, which offers Germany access to “qualified labour” but is also intended to speed up deportations and support Ruto’s government. For months, the corrupt Kenyan government has been bloodily suppressing mass protests demanding Ruto’s resignation and the cancellation of austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Ruto, whose police have killed at least 39 protesters and have been notorious for years for extrajudicial killings, spoke to the press about the deal with Germany as a “win-win result.”

In July 2023, the EU concluded an agreement with the right-wing Tunisian government of Kais Saied, which, among other things, provided for the Tunisian border regime to be financed with €105 million to prevent refugees from crossing the Mediterranean.

Since summer 2022, the Moroccan government of King Mohammed VI has been acting as Europe’s brutal “gatekeeper” at Spain’s external EU border in agreement with the PSOE-Podemos government in Madrid. The agreement includes Spain recognising Morocco’s sovereignty over the formerly Spanish-occupied territory of Western Sahara. According to the Moroccan armed forces, around 87,000 migrants were stopped in 2023, a sharp increase compared to around 56,000 between January and August 2022. The EU provided Morocco with €1.2 billion between 2014 and 2022, including hundreds of millions for the purpose of taking action against migrants.

In June 2022, Moroccan “security forces” drove refugees from the war-torn regions of the Sahel and Sudan from the Spanish border at gunpoint, killing at least 23 people. In 2023, more people than ever before died in the Atlantic Ocean trying to reach Spanish territory. As the Austrian *Kronen Zeitung* reports, citing high-ranking EU representatives, the previous agreement was nevertheless to be deepened this year by a “migration pact,” the main features of which were agreed

between the EU and Morocco in December last year. In January of this year, Spain’s Supreme Court condemned the authorities’ decision to send dozens of unaccompanied minors from the Spanish exclave of Ceuta back to Morocco in May 2021 as “illegals.”

The EU has also been working closely with authorities and paramilitary forces in Libya for years, overseeing a system of serious human rights violations. For example, a recent EU communication boasts of operationally training border guards from the Libyan Ministry of the Interior as part of the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Libya (EUBAM Libya). The so-called “Libyan Coast Guard” has been supported by the EU for years with equipment and funding worth millions of euros.

The *InfoMigrants* website has compiled eyewitness reports according to which refugees in Libya are “confronted daily with physical and sexualised violence, forced labour, exploitation, arbitrary detention and extortion.” Even the spokesperson for the United Nations Human Rights Office, Liz Throssell, spoke to *Deutsche Welle* in July of “widespread human rights violations against migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Libya,” including torture, forced labour, extortion, starvation under intolerable detention conditions, mass displacement and human trafficking. This happened “on a large scale and with impunity, with both state and non-state actors often working together.”

Following the migration deals with Turkey, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco, the EU also signed an agreement with Lebanon in May this year, which stipulates that the country will prevent Syrian refugees from travelling to Europe in return for a financial injection of €1 billion. Amidst Israel’s escalating military strikes against Lebanon, aid organisations are warning that this agreement was also paving the way for further human rights violations.

The campaign against refugees and migrants stems from the same capitalist logic that underlies the global escalation of war. It is directed against the European and international working class as a whole, of which they are a part, and must therefore be vehemently rejected by workers across Europe. The answer must be a socialist policy based on the international unity of the working class, a recognition of their common interests and a perspective of overthrowing capitalism. The Socialist Equality Parties in Europe and worldwide are fighting for this orientation.



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