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By Johannes Stern
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Stop the war on refugees at the Greek-Turkish border!

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) and the International Committee of the Fourth International condemn the war being waged against refugees at the Greek-Turkish border. The pictures seen around the world over recent days recall the darkest chapters of European history and expose the true character of the European Union (EU) and all capitalist governments across the continent.



Migrants run to avoid tear gas thrown by Greek police during clashes near the Pazarkule border gate in Edirne, at the Turkish-Greek border on Monday, March 2, 2020. (AP Photo/Darko Bandic)

Before the eyes of a shocked public, heavily armed police and military units are intervening against helpless refugees who have fled the conflicts in the Middle East to seek refuge in Europe. Over the weekend, Greek soldiers forcibly prevented 10,000 refugees from crossing the border, firing tear gas at women and children. The first reports of the use of live ammunition and the killing of refugees began to appear yesterday.

BBC journalist Mughira al Sharif published a video on his Twitter account showing a group of agitated young men trying to assist a man who was lying motionless on the ground. His face was covered in blood. “Ahmed Abu Emad, a Syrian immigrant killed by the Greek military this morning. Ahmed was shot at 9:07 a.m. by the Greek military as he tried to cross the border at Ipsala with hundreds of immigrants. Ahmed’s body was brought back to Turkey,” wrote al Sharif.

Greek government spokesman Stelios Petsas described the video as “fake news” and Turkish propaganda. However, it is clear that the Greek government is preparing for a much more comprehensive and deadly operation against refugees. Since Monday, Greek military units have been conducting live fire exercises on the islands in the eastern Aegean Sea, where tens of thousands of refugees are rotting in overcrowded camps in dreadful conditions.

The exercises were a direct response to the boats that began arriving a day earlier from Turkey on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, and Samos. According to a report from the Greek public broadcaster, at least one child drowned in the process. Anyone who manages to make it to dry land is being arrested. To do this, the Greek government has suspended the EU asylum law. “Our national security council decided to maximise the deterrence on our borders. Beginning immediately, we will not accept any asylum applications for a month,” said conservative Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Sunday.

To enforce these measures, which are illegal under international law, the Greek military and police are often collaborating with local gangs of fascist thugs, who attack refugees, aid workers, and journalists. German photojournalist Michael Trammer documented on Sunday how a group of young men on Lesbos attacked a boat full of women and children in front of the Greek coast guard before beating Trammer so badly that he required medical care. “A head wound required stitches. I have bruises on my head and body,” he later told *Die Zeit*.

The brutal offensive against refugees and anyone who sympathises with them, or even reports critically on the issue, enjoys the full support of the authorities in Berlin, Paris, and

Brussels. European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen promised additional support would be provided to Greece and Bulgaria on Monday. “Our priority is to give Greece and Bulgaria all necessary support so the situation can be dealt with there,” she declared. “The challenge now faced by Greece is a European challenge.”

French President Emmanuel Macron spoke along similar lines. “Full solidarity with Greece and Bulgaria. France is ready to contribute to the European efforts, provide swift assistance, and protect its borders. We must act together to prevent a humanitarian and immigration policy crisis,” he said.

What Von der Leyen and Macron mean by “challenge” and “assistance” can be clearly seen on the Greek-Turkish border: the securing of “fortress Europe” through the mobilisation of military personnel and fascist thugs.

According to reports, the notorious EU border protection agency Frontex has sent reinforcements to Greece. The state of alarm has been increased to high, and aerial surveillance by satellites and planes has been intensified. Bulgaria also deployed 350 extra troops and special forces to its border. Other countries are preparing similar measures. Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who heads a coalition government in Vienna with the Greens, threatened to strengthen the borders along the West Balkan route with Austrian police units.

Manfred Weber, the head of the conservative parliamentary group in the European Parliament, made clear the scope of the EU’s planned military operations against refugees in comments Monday. “The EU states have talked long enough,” Greece requires urgent help, and the EU needs an “immediate initiative” to deploy 10,000 European border soldiers, he remarked.

In an interview with the Deutschlandfunk radio station, Weber, who used Nazi-style language in 2018 to demand a “final solution to the refugee issue,” praised the brutal actions of the Greek military. He left no doubt about the fact that the war against refugees is in reality directed against the entire working class, which in France and Germany is beginning to protest against austerity, the rearmament of the military and the domestic apparatus of state repression, and the rise of militarism and fascist terrorism.

“If the state ensures that the external borders are secure and that the law is obeyed, then it must also be capable of doing so at demonstrations, like in Germany and France. ... To deploy tear gas. That’s what we Germans do if there’s violence on the streets,” he provocatively declared.

Weber also refused to exclude the option of a German-European military intervention in Syria—the very outcome Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is seeking with his effective abandonment of the dirty deal reached between Ankara and Brussels on refugees. “Can it manage to establish a zone in northern Syria under international command with a UN mandate, as Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer suggested a few months ago, to offer the people a safe haven, to offer them security and stability?” asked Weber. “That would certainly be the best outcome for the tortuous situation we now have in Syria.”

One is compelled to recall what Trotsky wrote in his 1933 essay “What Is National Socialism?”: “Not every exasperated petty bourgeois could have become Hitler, but a particle of Hitler is lodged in every exasperated petty bourgeois.”

While the German bourgeoisie has fully embraced the refugee policy of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), it is increasingly retracing the steps of the Nazis in its foreign and military policies. What Weber cynically refers to as “the best for Syria” would in reality produce more death and destruction. The establishment of a German-European security zone would further incite the war for oil and imperialist interests that has been raging for nine years in Syria and three decades throughout the Middle East and raise the danger of a direct clash between the major powers.

Leon Trotsky noted in the Manifesto of the Fourth International on Imperialist War, written in the early stages of World War II, the connection between capitalism, anti-refugee agitation, racism, and war.

“The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded,” he wrote. “In an era of aviation, telegraph, telephone, radio, and television, travel from country to country is paralysed by passports and visas. The period of the wasting away of foreign trade and the decline of domestic trade is at the same time the period of the monstrous intensification of chauvinism and especially of anti-Semitism. ... Amid the vast expanses of land and the marvels of technology, which has also conquered the skies for man as well as the earth, the bourgeoisie has managed to convert our planet into a foul prison.” [1]

The pseudo-left parties across Europe, Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and the Left Party in Germany, support the pro-war, pro-austerity policies. “Yes, there is a right to protect the borders. The European Court of Human Rights confirmed that recently,” stated Left Party member of the European Parliament Özlem Demirel on Deutschlandfunk on Monday. This underscores that the working class confronts revolutionary tasks. Just like

the 1930s, capitalism cannot be reformed or pacified. It must be overthrown and replaced with socialism.

The war against refugees at the European external borders is the flip side of the growing right-wing extremist terror against people with a migration or Jewish background, as recently in Hanau and Halle. The two cannot be separated. The more aggressively the ruling class pursues its policy of militarism and social dismantling to defend its interests and wealth, the more openly it resorts to dictatorship and fascist violence to suppress any opposition.

The SGP calls on workers to reject the attacks on refugees and immigrants and come to the defence of their democratic rights. Independent action and defence committees at workplaces, training centres, schools, and universities, and in neighbourhoods must be formed to organise protests and strikes to coordinate the opposition to the attacks on refugees and immigrants throughout Europe. The following demands should be raised and discussed as widely as possible:

- The dissolution of the prison camps for refugees in North Africa and the Middle East, the withdrawal of all European and US troops from these regions, and the safe and secure transfer of all refugees to the European country of their choice.
- The dissolution of the “hot spot” camps in Greece and other countries, and the recognition of all refugees and undocumented immigrants in Europe.
- The abolition of the EU’s Frontex border protection agency and the demilitarisation and opening of all borders.
- The refusal to cooperate with the EU’s deportation machinery and any state policies promoting ethnic cleansing.
- The making available of trillions of euros for public services, health care, and training, and the provision of jobs for every worker, regardless of their country of origin. The large banks and corporations must be nationalised and placed under democratic control.
- For the international unity of the working class in the struggle for a socialist programme against capitalism, fascism, and war.

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