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EU plans detention camps for Afghan refugees across Central Asia

After the humiliating collapse of the US puppet regime in Afghanistan on August 15, European Union (EU) officials are traveling to the Middle East and Central Asia. As German Interior Minister Heiko Maas and French President Emmanuel Macron meet officials across the region, the EU is earmarking over €1 billion for spending there.

This intervention exposes the hypocrisy of the EU powers' statements over the US debacle in Afghanistan. They echoed the US media's demands that the Taliban let Afghans, who helped Washington and the European powers occupy Afghanistan, flee from the Kabul airport. While posturing as defenders of Afghans' freedom of movement, however, they are working to set up detention camps across Central Asia—in Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and beyond—to imprison Afghans and keep them from seeking asylum in Europe.



Afghan refugees in an Italian Red Cross refugee camp, in Avezzano, Italy, Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

The construction of detention camps to house refugees in neighboring countries was the subject of a special meeting of EU interior ministers on Monday night in Brussels.

The EU's model in Afghanistan is the vast network of camps built in the Mediterranean to house millions of refugees fleeing the NATO wars in Syrian and Libya since 2011. Beside hundreds of thousands of refugees held in squalid detention camps in Europe like those of Moria in Greece or the Canary Islands in Spain, many more are held in camps in Turkey (3.7 million), Lebanon (1.5 million), Jordan (1.3 million) and Libya. EU-funded camps in Libya, in particular, are infamous for beating, sexually assaulting, murdering refugees or selling them into slavery.

The EU interior ministers summit budgeted €600 million for the upkeep of camps and maintaining good relations with countries in the region detaining Afghan refugees. In 2015, amid rising tensions between Turkey and the EU powers, around 1 million refugees in Turkey were allowed to travel on to Europe. The stated goal of ministers at the Brussels conference this week was to avoid a repeat of such events and to prevent Afghan refugees from arriving in Europe.

Arriving at the summit, German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer declared, "It's very important to accelerate diplomatic efforts. I expect the European Commission, if we agree politically today, to strongly support the neighbouring countries if they take Afghan refugees. ... If we act quickly, we won't repeat 2015."

Similarly, the Austrian, Danish and Czech interior ministers issued a joint statement before the meeting. They declared: "[T]he most important thing right now is to send the right message into the region: Stay there, and we will support the region to help the people."

The summit issued a "Statement on the situation in Afghanistan." It stated, "Based on lessons learned, the EU and its Member States stand determined to act jointly to prevent the recurrence of uncontrolled large-scale illegal migration movements faced in the past ..." It proposed diplomatic, construction and police initiatives facilitating the operation of

EU detention camps in countries near Afghanistan, such as Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkey.

It continued, “The EU should also strengthen the support to the countries in Afghanistan’s immediate neighborhood to ensure that those in need receive adequate protection primarily in the region. The need for unified and coordinated external but also internal communication is key. Targeted information campaigns should be launched to combat the narratives used by smugglers, including in the on-line environment, which encourage people to embark on dangerous and illegal journeys towards Europe.”

The statement blandly refers to EU aid to Central Asian countries to “reinforce border management capacity” and stepped-up EU “external operations for asylum capacity building.” What is involved, stripping these euphemisms away, are plans to fund and oversee a continent-wide network of border police agencies and prison camps for hundreds of thousands or millions of people.

EU Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas boasted to the *Financial Times* that the EU would have ample funding for such plans .“We are at the beginning of the budgetary cycle, we’re not scraping the barrel as we were in 2015. I don’t think money will be the problem,” she said.

The overnight collapse of the US puppet regime has exposed the failure of the 20-year NATO war in Afghanistan and of the imperialist powers’ response to the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Washington sought for 30 years to use its military hegemony to counterbalance its accelerating economic decline, invading countries across the Middle East and Central Asia. While claiming millions of lives and wasting trillions of dollars, these wars also led to the greatest refugee crisis since World War II, as 82.4 million people had to flee their homes.

In this period and especially since the 2015 refugee crisis—which came amid a wave of terror attacks across Europe by Islamist networks, which the NATO powers had used as proxies in Libya and Syria—the European imperialist powers are adopting ever more fascistic, police-state policies. The targeting of refugees for mass drownings in the Mediterranean or for internment in camps, where they are being beaten and assaulted,

went hand in hand with the cultivation by the ruling elite of fascistic and anti-refugee moods in the security forces and the entire state machine.

Facing the debacle of the US position in Central Asia and the discrediting of imperialist militarism among workers internationally, the EU powers are doubling down on anti-refugee policies. The day before the interior ministers meeting, as he departed for a tour of the region taking him to Turkey, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Qatar, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas referred to the strategic calculations and the pursuit of influence that underlie EU migration policies.

Maas pointed to the goals of his trip, calling for a “coordinated international approach to the Taliban. Our offer of support to the neighboring countries to assist them with coping with the humanitarian and economic fallout is also part of this. It is in our own interests to ensure that the collapse in Afghanistan does not destabilize the entire region.”

Similarly, before traveling to Iraq for talks, French President Emmanuel Macron gave an interview to the *Journal du Dimanche* addressing the US debacle and refugees. He called for “protecting” France from “large, irregular migrant flows,” asserting, “According to the High Commissioner on Refugees, there are already 850,000 Afghan refugees in Iran and 1.5 million in Pakistan. And the Tajik president, with whom I spoke two days ago, told me there is pressure on his border.”

Macron asserted that “massively increased financial contributions” are “our duty and the only way to prevent population movement that, otherwise, would be inevitable.” He also implicitly criticized the US pullout from Afghanistan and demanded that Washington pay a share of the prison camps’ budget. “We must multilateralize this issue, and the United States must carry their weight. They may not feel the migratory pressure, [but] they are not unrelated to the decision that triggered it.”

In reality, the debacle of the US-NATO war in Afghanistan is a historic exposure of the nature of imperialism and the necessity of expelling it from the Middle East and Central Asia. Nor are the EU imperialists an alternative to Washington. Their plans to replace NATO military units in Afghanistan with a regional network of EU-funded prison camps are deeply reactionary and deserve the opposition of workers across Europe and

internationally—defending freedom of movement and the right of Afghans and all peoples to travel, live and work where they please.

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