

The European War Against Refugees

Rejection of Refugees and EU Projects for Refugee Camps
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The first European projects for refugee camps in areas of war and crisis and at the borders of the EU were developed – not accidentally! – at the same time when the war in Irak started in spring 2003. Almost for one year the discussions about these projects took place only in circles of specialists. With the hustle and bustle in the media about the “case of Cap Anamur” (a German ship which took 37 African refugees on board in the Mediterranean) in July 2004 these projects suddenly came up again, caused by the proposal of the German minister of the interior, Schily – in quick agreement with his Italian colleague Pisanu – to build so-called “Auffanglager” (reception camps) for boat people in North Africa. The Italian government started in the beginning of October to send boat people, stranded in Italy, to Libya, where they were put into camps, financed by Italy, until their deportation. Meanwhile representatives of governments and enterprises of all important EU member states shake hands with Ghaddafi. Ghaddafi did hardly mean the freedom of movement for refugees and migrants when he said in his speech at the opening ceremony of a gas project with Berlusconi on the 7th of October 2004: “There is no life without mobility and mobility is brought about by energy.” The German chancellor Schroeder declared on the 15th of October 2004 on German television, he would agree to his Libyan colleague that refugees should be supported in their countries of origin, which means: should be deported back and to be prevented from entering the “fortress Europe”.

The chronology of the debates about refugee camps in the year 2003 and since summer 2004 shows the inhumanity of the EU refugee policy, but also its internal contradictions.

I. Projects for Refugee Camps In 2003

The first paper of the British cabinet and Home Office, cynically called “**A New Vision for Refugees**”, dates from February 2003 and comprised two elements:

1. **Intervention**, also by military means, in countries which produce refugees, to stop the “flow” of refugees and make their return possible;
2. creation of a “**global network of safe havens**”, later called “**Regional Protection Areas**” (**RPA**), near or even in countries producing refugees as well as closer to or in the EU.

The camps in Macedonia, where refugees were interned and guarded by the military during the Kosovo war, served as a model for these camps. Only a minority of these refugees was allowed to enter EU member states for a limited time.

Another proposal was an amendment of the Geneva Convention for Refugees of 1951, in order to make it possible to bring back refugees, who had already arrived in the “Fortress Europe”, to these “safe havens”.

As an additional version, Blair proposed to the president of the EU Council in March 2003 a concept for so-called “**Transit Processing Centres**” (**TPC**) outside the EU borders, in which refugees in transit as well as those deported back from EU countries would be interned to examine their asylum claims. Especially “obviously unfounded” asylum claims of refugees from certain countries defined as “safe” should be processed in these camps, where these people could prove that they were no “economic migrants”.

The background of these proposals was that in 2002 Britain had become the country with the highest number of asylum seekers in the industrialized world and Blair had promised to his electorate to change this. Similar to Schily in 2004, he claimed that such a system was more “human”, because the dangerous journey to the country of

destination would not be necessary any more. The British proposal was at that time supported by the Dutch, the Austrian and the Danish governments.

Reacting to these concepts, Ruud Lubbers, **UNHCR**, presented on the 17th of March 2003 on a meeting in London his **“three prong model”** for a more effective management of refugees. The “domestic approach” had as an aim a more effective national asylum system and dealing with refugees. With “aid in crisis areas” the “flows of refugees” should be already stopped in the regions of origin. And the **“EU prong”** aimed at a common European coping with flows of migration, mainly by building closed refugee camps for the processing of asylum cases also of refugees who had already entered the EU. The main difference to the British projects: **The refugee camps should be build inside the (extended) EU**. These refugee centres should, according to the UNHCR, “reduce the misuse of asylum”, because now up to ¾ of all asylum seekers entering Europe would not fulfill the criteria of refugees. That is why lists of “safe countries” would make sense. Refugees from those countries could process their asylum claims in those camps and the minority who would be recognized would be distributed to the EU-countries according to a quota system, the others would be “sent back home” immediately. The UNHCR argued also with financial reasons: For each asylum seeker in Europe about 10.000 Dollars are being spent every year. On the other hand, the UNHCR only pays an average amount of 50 Dollars for each of millions of refugees all over the world (numbers according to “Sueddeutsche Zeitung”, 4.6.03).

On a conference of the EU ministers of justice and interior affairs at the end of March 2003 the Netherlands, Italy and Spain supported the UNHCR-version of the British concept, while the German minister of the interior, Schily, made sceptical remarks. In an interview to “The Observer” (11.5.03) he said, the British proposal would increase rather than reduce the numbers trying to get into Europe. He would agree on the same aims, but these camps would not work, they would only attract additional refugees coming there. On a symposium of the UNHCR in the end of June 2003 in Berlin he emphasized that the German regulations of “safe third countries” and “safe countries of origin” would work much better and one should do everything to prevent migration already in the regions of origin. The German government has always resisted against refugee quota to distribute refugees among the EU member states and does not want a “burden sharing” with countries, which (not least because of their external EU borders) are not dealing as “effectively” in rejecting refugees as Germany does.

Unlike Schily’s arguments, the Swedish government criticized the concept because of legal and humanitarian reasons, similar to a huge number of refugee- and human rights organisations. Because of these statements, the **EU Commission** dissociated itself in the beginning of June officially from the British concept and also from the concept of the UNHCR concerning TPCs. The decision No. 26 on the EU summit in the middle of June 2003 in Greece reads as follows: The EU conference asks the EU Commission, “to examine all means on how the capacity of countries of origin to protect refugees can be increased. (...) The Council states that a number of member states is planning, as part of this process, to examine together with the UNHCR the possibility of a better protection of refugees in their region of origin.” Officially Britain withdrew her proposal of TPCs, and in the media it was mostly presented as if the EU had rejected the British projects. But the EU summit gave the green light for pilot schemes and approved a 12 months study and a report about “practical proposals”. “The idea is to bring safe havens closer to the people and their places of origin”, a spokesman of the EU Commission said to journalists on the EU summit. This means a clear “Yes” to the regional shift of refugee protection close to the countries of origin. After the EU summit there were some small reports about projects of refugee camps, e.g. in Croatia or Bulgaria, but the governments denied these news, and about

“Regional Protection Areas”, e.g. in Kenia. Beside this, the topic was hardly discussed in public.

II. Already Existing Camps, Procedures and Agreements to Reject and to Deport Refugees

Beside the not very well known “resettlement” programmes in connection with refugee camps in various crisis areas, where refugees can apply for reception in certain destination states, there are already several camps at the EU borders to reject and to deter refugees and migrants. I want to give only some examples:

The **Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta** in Morocco were discovered only less than ten years ago as loopholes to enter Europe. That is why in 1999 the old barbed wire was replaced by a metallic fence, three meters high, under floodlight, guarded by cameras, microphones and sensors. In front of the fence, hundreds of Africans are camping, and again and again some of them managed to get over the fence – and so enter Europe. Consequently, the fence is being increased to six meters and the guards are reinforced. Inside the enclaves there are camps with 500 places each, which are always full (numbers according to “Frankfurter Rundschau”, 16.8.04).

On the other side of the Mediterranean, there are more and more camps especially in Italy. On the nearest island to Africa, **Lampedusa**, only 20 square kilometers large, “clandestini” (undocumented migrants) have been arriving for 20 years. In former times, nobody talked about them, and the immigrants continued their journey to the mainland of Italy. During the last years, they are immediately put in a camp, and a new camp is under construction, allegedly in order to protect the tourist business against the refugees. Racism is fueled by the government. But a restaurant owner said: “We have nothing against the clandestini, but they should come as free human beings!” (“Sueddeutsche Zeitung”, 28.7.03).

On the island of **Sicily** and on the **mainland of Italy** there are deportation camps since 1998, ironically called “Centri di Permanenza Temporanea” (CPT) – centres for temporary residence. The closed centres in Agrigent and Caltanissetta became well known because of the imprisonment of the refugees from the ship “Cap Anamur”. Other CPTs are for example, in Apulia, where they were originally built for the detention of refugees coming from Albania to Italy across the Adrian Sea. Their numbers were almost reduced to zero by common patrols of Italian and Albanian special forces. That is why in the CPT Regina Pacis in San Foca, located directly at the tourist beach and in summer 2003 a target of international protests, mostly undocumented migrants are interned, who came via Libya to Sicily. (More about the Italian camps in articles and books edited by “Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration”, FFM)

There is not much known about **camps in North African countries**. But during the last years, especially Italy has put increasing pressure mainly on transit countries like Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, in order to force them to introduce a stricter **surveillance of their coasts as well as their borders in the Sahara desert**. But the North African countries are not willing to do this without any return service, because they have no means to arm the borders and they do not have much interest to do this. The money transfer of their own citizens living abroad is one of the largest income resources. That is why Italy uses **immigration quotas and development aid** as means of pressure. **Tunisia** signed an new agreement in December 2003, which included equipment and training for the border patrols, but also a higher quota for immigration. After this agreement, the Tunisian parliament passed stricter laws against smuggling of migrants. In Tunisia, which signed the Geneva Convention, but does not have an asylum law, there are **13 detention centres**, financed by Italy, most of them at secret places. **Egypt** only got an immigration quota, when a liaison officer of the Italian police could settle down in Cairo.

Libya is not a country of emigration, but of immigration and transit. That is why there was no immigration quota for Italy, and because of the EU embargo, no (military) equipment for the border patrols could be delivered. All this has changed since Libya is no longer regarded by the EU as a “rogue state”, but as a profitable business partner. To analyse this would require an additional article. There is also not much known about the change of the Libyan internal policy against immigrants, especially from Nigeria, Niger and Chad as well as from Egypt and other North African countries, who were welcome for a long time as cheap workers. The change began already in autumn 2000, when clashes between Libyans and other Africans near Tripoli led to six deaths. Many Nigerians were deported. Since March 2004, a law restricts immigration and intends to expel unemployed foreigners. The deportees “live” in tents in the desert, and mass deportations, e.g. to Eritrea, began at the same time when an Italian officer arrived.

Also **Morocco** did not start mass deportations of black Africans on its own – on the 30th of December 2003 there was the first charter flight with 416 people to Nigeria, and Morocco gets 40 Millions Euro for the coming three years from the EU to “fight illegal migration”. At the same time, racism against black people is growing.

The **EU programme AENEAS** has as an aim to “encourage the willingness of third countries to adopt agreements to take back migrants” in the whole Mediterranean area.

But there are also **deportation agreements** which **failed** because of resistance in the countries of origin and in Europe, like the one between **Switzerland and Senegal**, which was already signed in January 2003. It intended to deport rejected African asylum seekers, whose identity could not be proved, to Senegal and to intern them on the airport in Dakar, where African Embassies could pick out “their” citizens. Because of protests of human rights organisations and African migrants, who were just on holidays in Senegal, the Senegalese parliament refused in March 2003 to adopt the agreement.

But the policy of detention camps and deportation agreements is quite far developed at the **new eastern borders of the EU**. This concerns refugees and migrants in transit, but also those who have already entered the EU. Some time ago, Austria and the three Baltic states proposed to build a detention camp for refugees from Chechnya outside the EU borders, like in Ukraine.

III. Camp Projects 2004 as a Reaction to the Rescue Action of the Ship “Cap Anamur”

On the 19th of July 2004, on the peak of the arguments about the rescue operation of 37 African refugees in the Mediterranean by the German ship “Cap Anamur”, owned by the relief organisation of the same name, the German minister of the interior, Schily, talked on a meeting of the EU justice ministers for the first time about the possibility to build “**Auffanglager**” (**reception camps**) **for boat people in North Africa**. “This is more human than drowning”, Schily said about this solution. In an opinion poll by the German television station ntv on 20.7.04, 76% of the viewers voted in favor of refugee camps in North Africa.

A lot of media reports, every day a little different, were published about questions like: What kind of camps should be built and for whom, who would be in command there and who would decide about their construction? Schily and his Italian colleague Pisanu said for example in a common press release on 16.8.04, an institution for refugees picked up on the sea should be built, which takes and examines asylum claims. If the asylum claim is recognized, this institution should look for a reception of the person in a third country, normally “close to their country of origin with support of the EU” (Schily in FAZ 22.7.04). Refugees should get asylum in Europe only “on a voluntary basis of the respective states”. At the same time, a clearing centre should

be installed outside Europe, where EU member states could register their demands for legal immigration. In the newspaper SZ (2.8.04) Schily is quoted with the following proposal: "There (in North Africa) will be a reception centre and an institution, composed of government officials of the asylum authorities of EU member states. This institution checks: Do the refugees have any reason according to the Geneva Convention of refugees, which opposes a return to their country of origin? If they do not have a reason, they must go back. (...) A judicial control is not obligatory. We are outside the area of EU laws."

Schily had made all these proposals without asking for the agreement of other members of his government and their parties, and in the following weeks a **debate** came up about this **in the German public**. The opinions about the camp projects were different across the borders of parties, and also in welfare organisations there were negative as well as positive reactions.

On the **EU level** a lot of different remarks and interpretations about Schily's projects went round during the last weeks and months. On a meeting of the EU ministers of the interior in the beginning of October, Schily suddenly talked only about "**Welcome Centres**" for refugees in North Africa, and there was a lot of confusion in the press. "Schily's camp projects failed" wrote one paper, "A lot of approval for the ideas of the German minister of the interior" wrote another one. The EU ministers **decided to set up five reception centres** in Algeria, Libya, Mauretania, Morocco and Tunisia at a date not yet agreed on. EU commissioner Vitorino stressed that no asylum claims for Europe could be processed in these camps, only for the respective country. The Moroccan minister of the interior declared that his country was not ready to accept such camps. The UNHCR, Lubbers, on the other hand, did not refuse Schily's ideas, if a fair asylum procedure would be possible in these camps outside the EU and the UNHCR would be involved. On 14.10.04 the EU Parliament said "No" to refugee camps outside the EU, because they bring along the "obvious danger to violate basic rights". Some days later, Schily presented his proposals to the G 5 meeting in Florence. Italy supported his projects, France and Spain argued against them, and Britain left the meeting before it ended. On 5.11.04 the leaders of the 25 EU governments met. According to the newspaper "Frankfurter Rundschau" (6.11.04) they agreed on the following: "Common asylum rules for the EU shall be approved until 2010, whereby it should be examined, if there is a possibility to process asylum claims outside the territory of the EU. In connection with this, the cooperation with transit states, especially in the Mediterranean and in Eastern Europe should be improved. The aim behind this decision is, according to experts, to prevent refugees from approaching Europe already far outside the EU borders – a proposal which complies in a non-committal form with the Italian and German wishes to set up reception camps for refugees in North Africa."

In the meantime, facts are created: Italy deports refugees from Lampedusa to Libya without examining their asylum claims. After lifting the weapons embargo of the EU against Libya on 11.10.04, not only Berlusconi and Pisanu, but also Schroeder and Schily are negotiating with Ghaddafi. The talks are mainly about business with oil, gas and orders for the German trade and industry, not least for arms producing companies. This means: Rejection of refugees is not only a political interest, but also companies are getting profit from it by selling patrol boats and surveillance technology to North African countries. If they also deliver tents or construction material for camps, as it was reported in the media, is a second question.

All governors north and south of the Mediterranean would like to see unwanted refugees and migrants where they (according to their opinion) belong to: in their **countries of origin**. Concerning this aim, they can already show some "success": The German newspaper "taz" reported for example in a small article on 21.8.04 that the police in Sierra Leone prevented a ship with more than 500 refugees on board to

leave the harbour into the direction of the Canary Islands. During this common action of the Sierra Leonean, the Spanish and the Guinean authorities the captain and the crew were arrested.

This means: Not only the crew of the ship “Cap Anamur” was put in jail in this summer because they supported refugees. That at least this organisation does not start such actions again, was shown, when the members of the organisation “Cap Anamur” voted their president, Elias Bierdel (who was on the ship during the action) out of office in the beginning of October – ironically at the same time when the mass deportations from Lampedusa started.

IV. Critics and Strategies of Resistance

The actual camp projects show that the European refugee policy is coming to a head and becoming more and more military. Camps do not only mean inhuman living conditions with a lot of conflicts, but even more a **deprivation of rights, a stigmatisation and isolation** of human beings interned there. They are promoting **exclusion and racism** against human beings, who are being marked by interning them as non-citizens. This applies also, but even more for closed, extraterritorial camps, whose extreme example is Guantánamo. The EU camps in North Africa, proposed by Schily, are **means to advance the EU borders** and can be declared soon as **“safe third countries”**, into which refugees who have already entered Europe can be deported. Also refugees whose asylum claim is recognized, should not be allowed to enter Europe – that’s why the politicians are talking about **“regional protection areas”** near the countries of origin. In negotiations with corrupt leaders, they are selling technology and know-how to prevent migration and call it “development aid”.

In EU documents, **flight and migration movements to Europe** are described as **threatening factors** and connected with the fight against “criminality” and “terrorism”. “By doing this, the European migration regime abolishes the distinction between displaced persons, refugees and migrants in favour of constructed dangerous ‘flows of migration’. Only the small number of wanted migrant workers can enter Europe in a legal way.” The humanitarian, defensive critics of the political asylum and refugee organisations does not comprise this, “because it forgets to show that the European migration policy is a facet of the policy to maintain the global order of inequality, from which the riches of the metropolises come” (Dirk Vogelskamp, “War against the poor”, Sept. 2004). The **fight for political and social rights** must therefore be extended to all people, independently of a status of refugee or residence.

The governments of the European states, of the countries of transit and origin are already working together on all levels. But there are **contradictions in their policy**: The borders of the EU will never be totally closed – not only because certain factions of the capital want an ethnic hierarchy on the labour market to maximize their profit and therefore they need migrants without rights, but also because human beings fighting for survival cannot be stopped by barbed wire and patrol boats. The exclusion (in German: ex-bordering) policy of the ruling class puts more and more up with the death of the unwanted. If we want to create resistance against this policy, we also have to **build up international networks**: with refugees in Europe, their compatriots “back home” and on the way, with human rights organisations in Europe, in countries of transit and origin. We are fighting for the possibility to enter Europe, for equal rights in Europe and against deportations. The general aim are political and social rights for all human beings everywhere.