
EU WANTS TO CENTRALIZE ITS ASYLUM PROCESS

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Europe's refugee crisis won't be resolved by the EU Commission's proposals. They want to reflect further and develop asylum law in the EU. But just how and when will this happen? Bernd Riegert reports from Brussels.

Is the EU Commission afraid of its own courage? Confidential papers from the Commission that were recently leaked to media sources in Brussels reveal that the EU Commission wants to propose to member states a centralization of the asylum process. Decisions concerning asylum applications would go through European authorities, which is seen as a further development in immigration policy.

That was no longer the case after the weekly meeting of the EU Commission in Brussels Wednesday. Frans Timmermans, Vice President of the Commission, appeared before the press, delayed by consultation with the 28 Commissioners from all member states. The most sensitive parts in the asylum documents would be eliminated, declared Timmermans.

"Long-term, there are other options, including a centralized European system with European decisions taken regarding individual asylum applications. But from a political perspective, it isn't realistic to speak of that today. For that reason, we also didn't propose that today."

Markus Ferber, the CSU party representative responsible for immigration policy at the EU told Deutsche Welle that such a proposal by the Commission would have surprised him. "I would consider it a bit adventurous for such a mammoth administration to succeed at the European level."

The two options: realistic, not radical

Frans Timmermans and his colleague Dimitris Avramopoulos, who is responsible for migration in the EU Commission, believe that the member states would not relinquish their sovereign rights to decide which asylum applicants will and will not be taken in. Which is why they are limiting themselves to just two options that they see as feasible. A formal proposal for the reform of the asylum system will only be presented after discussions throughout the summer with the interior ministers of the member states. That bill would then need to be approved by the Council of Ministers and European Parliament.

The two options:

Option 1: In which fundamentally everything stays as it is. The so-called Dublin Regulation would remain in place and could only be deactivated via an emergency mechanism. Every state which is the first to receive a migrant is solely responsible for the asylum process of that migrant. In reality at the moment, that's mainly Greece and Italy; other member states can deport asylum applicants who first stepped foot in those countries back to Greece and Italy. Only when Greece and Italy are suddenly overwhelmed should the other EU states be required to take in asylum applicants.

Option 2: Revoke the Dublin Regulation. "We could change the criteria which decide which member states are responsible for asylum applicants. In this scenario, right at the beginning, it would be decided who is responsible for the application process and it would be decided based on a set ratio of allocation," said Timmermans. Such a process would require solidarity from all EU member states; Greece and Italy are for it. Germany could win friends with a quota system but at the moment is for the strict application of the Dublin Regulation. All EU states are trying to push the responsibility for the refugees and asylum applicants to Greece, or better yet, to Turkey. That's at the heart of the EU-Turkey deal which currently sees refugees returned across the Aegean.

New approach, old proposals

Timmermans leaves no doubt that he prefers the second option. "The Dublin system as it currently exists is full of holes; it doesn't work." The same proposal that the EU Commission put on the table for review was basically the same as the one made this past May in their "Migration Agenda," according to EU Commissioner for Migration, Avramopoulos.

The proposal includes a unified asylum process and requirements for asylum applicants in all 28 member states. In principle, that's already been agreed, but hasn't been put into action by all the states, argue the Commissioners. Also in principle, the decision made last summer to divvy up the refugees and asylum applicants from Greece and Italy among other member states, doesn't work. Of the maximum of 160,000 planned resettlements of refugees, just 1,100 have occurred to date. Avramopoulos can only groan when asked about those requirements already in place that are so similar to those in option two.

"The political will on the part of the member states is simply lacking," he says, sounding resigned.

'It won't just go away'

His colleague, meanwhile, is pursuing a passionate appeal. The EU has to manage the refugee crisis on its own, he says. Working on an individual level, as Germany has done, or as some states along the Balkan route have done, only splits the EU. The only "European solution" that can be agreed to is the outsourcing of the responsibility to Turkey, which is already taking place on the Aegean.

"It is vital that we limit this disorderly and increasing flow of migrants, protect our borders and preserve Schengen," said Timmermans.

"At the same time, we have to be certain that those who need protection can get it without having to put their lives in the hands of smugglers."

Yet Timmermans finds that the solution has to look beyond the current situation in Greece toward the future. "The problem won't go away. The challenge remains."

Kaynak/Source: