
EU COMMISSION: ACCEPT ASYLUM-SEEKERS OR PAY UP

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EU nations that reject asylum seekers from overburdened frontline states will face a 250,000 euro charge per refugee under a plan unveiled by the European Commission. It's drawn rapid rebuffs from Slovakia and Poland.

A revised relocation system to reform the EU's so-called "Dublin" asylum system was proposed Wednesday by the EU's executive. Italy, with tens of thousands of new arrivals, has led the push for a "fairness mechanism" when it comes to dealing with asylum-seekers who enter the 28-member bloc.

The EU Commission' proposal to revise future redistribution rules under Dublin would see quotas based on each nation's population and wealth. If a nation found itself handling 50 percent more than its due share, it would be allowed to reallocate asylum seekers to other nations.

EU solidarity needed, say Timmermans (M) and EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos (R).

The Commission said Wednesday any member state could opt to "temporarily not take part in the reallocation," but must then pay 250,000 euros (\$288,000) per asylum seeker.

The money would benefit the countries that took in applicants and process their requests.

Existing Dublin rules, which require refugees to register in the first EU state they reach and for that country to process the asylum application, largely broke down last year. Most of the 1 million migrants fleeing conflict and poverty in the Middle East and Africa reached the continent via Greece.

Wealthy Germany and Sweden took in many of the new arrivals, until early 2016 when Austria joined Balkan states in closing borders, using new fences and border strictures.

A one-off scheme approved last year to redistribute 160,000 has so far only led to the relocation of 1,441 asylum seekers.

On Wednesday, the Commission said the existing redistribution scheme would be enforced "to the full," with EU Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans telling reporters: "There is no a la carte solidarity in this union."

'Blackmail,' 'bad,' say Visegrad nations

Rejecting the plan Wednesday, Slovakia's interior minister, Robert Kalinak, said it "sets us back nine months and does not respect reality in some aspects."

"This is a bad system * it makes no sense; it violates EU member states' rights, said Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Blaszczak.

"It's blackmail, it's unacceptable and a non-European type of proposal from the [European] Commission," said Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto at a meeting of Visegrad nations in Prague.

"I'm still wondering if it's a serious proposal, because it sounds like an idea announced on April Fool's Day," said Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski, also in Prague.

"We equally reject proposals for sanctions for the non-compliance with such a quota," said Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka had said on Tuesday.

Lengthy debate anticipated

Any reform of the existing rules - from which Britain Ireland and Denmark have exemptions under EU treaties - would require majority approval by EU governments and from the European Parliament.

ipj/sms (Reuters, dpa, AFP)

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