
OPINION: WE CAN BUILD A FORTRESS EUROPE!

-

25.06.2018

Deutsche Welle (25 June 2018)

Angela Merkel may not have been handed a lifeline at the EU's mini-summit on migration, but the bloc now agrees that migrants must be kept far away. The price for this? Law and humanity, says DW's Barbara Wesel.

Now that Sunday's mini-summit on migration in Brussels has ended, can German Chancellor Angela Merkel present her coalition partner and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer with an answer as to how refugees can be packed off back to Italy? No. Merkel must work out a bilateral solution if she wants to achieve any progress on this front. Given the self-confident new government in Rome, one can only wish her the best of luck.

More than one EU head of state said after the Brussels meeting ended that the event was not intended to throw Merkel a lifeline as she faces domestic political challenges over how best to handle asylum-seekers coming to Europe. However, she seized the occasion on Sunday to wrap up a move to the right in migration policy.

Better security on the EU's external borders

Idle chat over how to better secure external borders has long been a key part of the migration debate. Yet the EU's few land borders to the south are actually already pretty well secured. Barbed wire fences could be made taller, and more border guards could be stationed there. And EU member states could receive more money to put toward strengthening their own border efforts. The EU Commission has called for 10,000 border guards to give the impression of a well-protected Europe. To date there have been few volunteers willing to provide the necessary personnel and money.

However, the border debate is actually about closing off the Mediterranean Sea route. Italy has already asked other EU countries for patrol boats – a request aimed primarily at its Mediterranean neighbor France. In principle, French President Emmanuel Macron supports the Rome government's position that responsibility for rescuing refugees out of the waters of the Mediterranean, especially those near the Libyan coast, lies with the coast guard there, which should be rewarded with more equipment and money. Austria's conservative chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, also is quite excited about France's movement on this issue.

Rights and rules thrown overboard

Amid this discussion, all talk of international and maritime law has grown quiet. There is no way that Libya can be considered a "safe harbor," but that has proven to mean nothing to those involved. And the money Libya will receive to supposedly take care of refugees will be a nice little bonus for the country's regional militias. The EU, however, feels no responsibility for the inhumane conditions found in Libyan refugee camps, which include torture, rape and murder. A vague reference to refugee aid coming from the United Nations is all the answer that is given.

Further plans for holding centers outside the EU, such as in Albania or somewhere in North Africa, are all currently being handled very discreetly. Word is that these would come from bilateral or, in a best-case scenario, multilateral agreements between individual nations. But the intention is there □ to cast off in this way those rejected asylum-seekers that cannot be sent back to their country of origin.

Populists set the course

When discussing migration, President Macron waxes lyrical about European values, but he is one of the first to disregard them. Hundreds of thousands are currently trapped in Libya. Handing them over to face the brutality of the militias would be inhumane and potentially unlawful. This is totally ignoring the ordeals migrants suffer and the reasons behind their flight. They are no longer humans; they are merely undesirables that Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Salvini can refer to as "meat" or "goods" without causing an outraged uproar.

The new populists ruling Italy will continue to push the remaining EU members along in the debate over migration. Macron has joined ranks because he does not want to offer France's far-right extremists any room to attack. In the same fold are the right-wing populist Austrian government and the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), which is challenging Merkel. Fear of this populist axis is so great that the majority of EU nations are ready to throw all human rights for migrants and refugees overboard. And in this case Chancellor Merkel can only go with the flow if she wants to save her own skin.

Kaynak/Source: