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## **MIGRANTS AT GERMAN-AUSTRIAN BORDER WILL BE RETURNED, SAYS KURZ**

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After a meeting in Vienna on Thursday (5 July), Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz welcomed Germany's decision to send back rejected asylum seekers to the EU countries where they first arrived – namely Italy, Greece and Spain.

Austria will not have to deal with asylum seekers refused at the German border. They will be sent back to the first country of arrival where they applied for protection, Germany's Interior Minister Horst Seehofer announced on Thursday.

Nobody here wants Austria to be responsible for asylum seekers. Italy and Greece are responsible for, said Seehofer. People at the German border will not be admitted but will be returned, he said.

Kurz said he was satisfied with the agreement and committed himself and the EU Presidency to work towards the enhancement of controls at the EU's external borders.

A Europe without internal borders will only be possible if there are functional external borders, Kurz told the press at a briefing in Vienna.

The political dispute between Seehofer and Angela Merkel has put the Schengen passport-free area under threat in recent weeks, and threatened to bring down the government grand coalition just months after it took power.

Seehofer, leader of the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), had triggered the crisis when he threatened to defy Merkel and turn back at the German border the small number of asylum seekers – a maximum of five people a day – who turn up after registering in other EU states.

The two-page agreement, reached after a short meeting at the historic Reichstag building on Thursday, formally ends the dispute over migration between the CSU and Merkel's CDU but leaves the German Chancellor weakened.

The agreement calls for asylum-seekers registered in other countries to be processed within 48 hours in police facilities, not separate transit centres, if they cannot be transported to the Munich airport to be returned to the country where they first applied for asylum.

But despite weeks of dispute over migration, Seehofer left it to Chancellor Angela Merkel to conclude agreements both with Italy and Greece.

When we are talking about European dimension is always a matter for the heads of governments, Seehofer said.

If negotiations with Italy and Greece fail, other countries will have to think about new measures in order to stop illegal migration, the German interior minister warned.

Austrian presidency to focus on external dimension of migration

After years of discussion, it is important that we have a common goal, Austrias Kurz told the press during a briefing in Vienna.

There is a lot to do for us and for Europe as a whole in order to turn those ideas into reality, Kurz underlined.

Starting next week, Germany, Austria and Italy will hold a meeting to work on how to close the Mediterranean route, Seehofer also announced.

The next step Kurz envisaged is to reinforce Frontex capacity and extend its mandate. In the meantime, the Chancellor pointed to the need to enhance the capacity of the Libyan coast guards so that they are more efficient when sending people back, amid allegations of human rights violations.

The presidency will also examine the possibility for disembarkation platforms to be set up outside the EU. We need to have talks with third countries, the chancellor said.

Without getting into details, diplomatic sources confirmed that some countries have shown their interest in accepting these facilities to be placed in their territory.

Kurz did not clarify whether it would be possible for migrants to seek asylum from these platforms. He indicated that he was in favour of resettlement programs, and said there is no discussion over who is more affected by the migratory flows.

While Italy and Greece are front-line countries, most asylum seekers have Austria, Germany and Sweden as their final destination countries, he said. Last year 150,000 people were received by Austria, where is the recognition of what Austria has done? Kurz wondered.

I am always a little irritated when we have to take a lesson that others preach to us, but others have only taken in a fraction of those numbers, the Chancellor stressed.

### **Kurz pledges to shield Schengen as border dispute unfolds**

Austrian Prime Minister Sebastian Kurz prioritised the protection of the external borders during his countrys EU Presidency stint, in order to safeguard the Schengen area, as a recent deal between Germanys conservative parties could lead to a resurrection of the blocs internal borders.

### **A road down to the far right?**

The conservatives of the OVP and the ultranationalist FPÖ form the government coalition in

Austria. This is the first time a far right party will be at the head of the rotating presidency of the EU, but not the first time it has taken office in Austria.

We had a position for thirteen years and for thirteen years we were told we were on the wrong line, Heinz-Christian Strache, chair of the FPÖ and vice chancellor of Kurz's government, told the press in Vienna.

For years we were going in the wrong direction, Strache said, but finally, people have listened to us.

### **Austria takes control of the EU, focusing on immigration**

The Austrian government (a mix of Christian-democrats and far-right eurosceptics) has taken over the rotating presidency of the Council with a programme focused on tackling immigration. EURACTIV's partner Euroefe reports.

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Kaynak/Source: