

29. October 2021

Defend human rights and the rule of law at Europe's borders!

Push-backs, violence and inhumane treatment in violation of international law have become a permanent reality at Europe's borders. They put people seeking protection in danger of their lives, as the deaths at the Polish-Belarusian border have also shown. Refugees are dehumanized by being called a "political weapon" or "a form of hybrid threat" by leading politicians.

We, the undersigned organizations, have been supporting people affected by this border violence for years. We note that the Geneva Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights are systematically violated at Europe's borders. EU member states disregard the principle of non-refoulement, a unique humanitarian and legal achievement that guarantees basic individual rights to those seeking protection.

This is not only an attack on the right to asylum and human rights. If lawless zones are accepted, if the rule of law is undermined, then this development also threatens democracy in Europe.

On October 6, a journalistic research collective published further evidence of violent push-backs at the EU's external borders in Greece and Croatia. Videos and photos show the brutality of special police units.

Push-backs and the violence against those seeking protection are an expression of a policy of deterrence instead of protection - at all costs. The EU and its member states are involved in this form of illegal border protection financially, logistically and often by deploying forces under the mandate of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex. The German government supports the Croatian border police with technical and logistical equipment, Poland has been offered similar support. German forces are part of the Frontex operation in Greece.

Berlin: For a fresh start in European refugee policy!

The three coalition parties, which negotiate in working groups since October 27, have made it clear in their exploratory paper: *"We are committed to the humanitarian responsibility arising from the German constitution, the Geneva Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights. From this, we derive the task of making efforts with our European partners to end the deaths on the Mediterranean as well as the suffering at Europe's external borders."*

We welcome this declaration of intent. To translate it into political action, it needs to be specified in the coalition agreement. Only the consistent enforcement of international law at Europe's borders, safe and regular pathways, a European sea rescue system and the solidary reception of protection seekers within the EU can end the suffering and death at Europe's borders.

We demand from the future federal government:

- Defend the right to asylum in Europe: access to the asylum procedure, access to the legal system and humane accommodation. No to a Europe of detention, refugee camps and border procedures!
- Defend human dignity, the rule of law and human rights - the very values on which the European Union (EU- Treaty Article 2) is based.
- The initiation of infringement procedures against Poland, Croatia and Greece by the European Commission. We also call on the EU to include human rights violations by Member States in the field of asylum and migration when initiating rule of law procedures in case of serious violations of the values mentioned in Article 2 EU-Treaty.
- The establishment of an independent, transparent and effective human rights monitoring mechanism that allows for unannounced visits to borders and the prosecution of perpetrators. Human rights monitors must have a mandate to secure evidence. The aim must be that this well-funded and well-staffed institution prevents human rights violations in the future.
- The end of any support for the border regime in Poland, Croatia, Greece and other states that violate international law at their borders.
- Firm reactions to human rights violations in Frontex operations: Suspension of funding and deployment of EU border guards in countries that violate international human rights standards.
- A civilian EU sea rescue program to prevent deaths in the Mediterranean. Boat refugees must be granted humane reception and access to a fair asylum procedure after landing in a safe European port. Safe and regular pathways to Europe must be created.
- The cooperation with the "Libyan Coast Guard" and the associated ongoing breach of international law in the Mediterranean must be stopped immediately.

