

FactCheck: HELLAS

Solidarity with the population in Greece

Issue 5, September 2015

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Organised destruction – remaining lessons



The issue of Greece has suddenly disappeared from headlines and talk shows. The German chancellor herself has now explained the reason for this sudden re-orientation of public attention as follows: "The refugee issue will keep us occupied a lot more than Greece." But even the

refugee issue bears a close relationship with Greece (see pages 5 and 8). The drama in Greece continues. Domestic demand will shrink once more because of the new memorandum – called "stability aid for the benefit of Greece" in German parliament. There will be pension cuts and an increase in VAT. Some sections of the productive economy are being deliberately damaged – including agriculture (Diesel fuel subsidies are being abolished) and tourism (lower VAT rates on the islands are being abolished). By forcibly establishing a privatisation fund the sell-out of the country is being organised efficiently – offering cut throat prices of course. That German airport company Fraport brought one of the most profitable Greek regional airports into its portfolio, thus making fat bounty, is no accident. Contrary to what Alexis Tsipras is saying there will be no further investment (The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung from August 19th says: "There can be no talk about new cash from EU-sources"). Greek debt will increase at a stroke by further 90 billion Euro. Public debt will be more than 200

per cent of GDP, double the amount of Greek GDP. Even Christine Lagarde, the IMF boss whose reason of existence is the professional squeezing of countries and populations in the interest of finance capital, declares: "Greek debts are not sustainable". This means: Greek debts can never ever be repaid. They will however be a constant lever to keep Greece in the state of being a protectorate of the EU and the creditors-Mafia.

The major EU-media have stopped communicating this catastrophic economic data. Suddenly, the slogan of the day is: Out of the eye, out of the mind. Even the elections of September 20th do not lead to much excitement in Brussels, Madrid, Rome and Berlin. As Henry Ford said: "You can choose any colour for your car, as long as it is black." In case of Greece this means: The election result doesn't matter, real policies are now being determined in Brussels and Berlin anyway.

How to explain this demonstrative dis-interest? Well, Schaeuble the disciplinarian ("I am well happy") and the other Euro-masters share the opinion that the

Greek example speaks for itself. They have visibly achieved their three central objectives. Firstly, austerity was defended as the Leitmotiv of any European economic policy – accentuated by the tears of hundreds of thousands of Greek pensioners, the sweat of millions of Greek labourers and the anger of tens of thousands of Greek peasants. Secondly, the governments in the periphery states were shown who is boss. From the Berlin point of view, this by now includes Paris. This also includes those who aspire to participate in future governments, for example Podemos leader Senor Iglesias in Spain. The message is: Those who rise up will be thrown viciously into the dirt. Thirdly, in Athens an authentic left was purposefully being humiliated and decimated. This was done to demonstrate how an alternative based on solidarity against austerity and bullying-capitalism can only lead in a dead end. Thus, Alexis Tsipras' explanation to the Greek population that he bowed down to blackmail, agreeing to a memorandum he himself does not really believe in, will not wash in the long run. This is not about "sin

once, repent and all is well". From now on Syriza-ministers will only be able to present left-wing views on public holidays and during election campaigns. But during the working week they will have to deliver a memorandum – point by point, law by law, using the police time and again – that will make concrete the sell-out of the country, ratcheting up social

divisions in society. To practically do something you do not believe in really means to lose credibility.

Following defeat, those who stood in solidarity with the Greek departure should not copy this policy of dis-interest. We stay the course; solidarity with the Greek population is not a fashion statement. And: We have learned a few things. Democracy is the opposite of Eurocracy. The single currency model is logically bound up with a disregard for democratic decisions. It is possible to win over a huge majority of the population for a courageous project of solidarity. It is a tragedy that the Ochi from July 5th has not been, or has been prevented from being, turned into action. But this is another story.

We should do everything we can to prevent as many of those people who everywhere in Europe watched the departure of Syriza with optimism and passion from falling away from their solidarity activism. When a new window opens as a result of the crisis, we will be able to build on these experiences and activism.

An angry letter

Highly esteemed presidents and leaders of governments! Your policies of war and exploitation have caused misery for millions of people in the middle-east and Africa. Worldwide, people are fleeing because of you. Every third refugee in Germany comes from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Every fifth refugee is from Africa. Your wars are a cause of worldwide terrorism. [...] Your cynical recklessness now rebounds onto us like a boomerang

As usual you do not consider to really change your policies. You only try to patch up symptoms. Every day the security situation is becoming more dangerous and chaotic because of this. Ever new wars, waves of terror and refugee catastrophes will dominate the future of our planet.

One of these days war will knock on the doors of Europe again. [...] The peoples of the middle-east and Africa whose countries you have destroyed and plundered pay a heavy price for your policies, as do the people in Europe now taking in countless numbers of refugees. But you wash your hands of it. You belong in front of the International Court of Justice. And every one of your political fellow travellers should really have to pay for the upkeep of at least one hundred refugee families.

Strictly speaking the people of this world need to rise up to resist you warmongers and exploiters. As Gandhi once did – peaceful, with civil disobedience. We should form new movements and parties – movements for justice and humanity. Wars in other countries should be punishable by law like murder and manslaughter in our own country. And you who are responsible for wars and exploitation should be sent to the devil forever.

It is enough! Be gone! The world is much nicer without you.

Juergen Todenhofer // Published on the author's facebook page at the end of August 2015. J. T. was an MP for the CDU between 1972 and 1990 and a top-manager of the media-company Burda between 1987-1990.

A message from us and a conference announcement

This is the fifth issue of the FactCheck:HELLAS magazine founded in April. It is published in Greek as a supplement of the Athens based daily newspaper EFSYN. Digital editions published in Spanish and English. See publishing information page 2. On the weekend of 17./18 October FCH and other FCH co-publishers will organise a Greece-solidarity conference with guests from Greece. Place: Berlin, Haus der Demokratie und Menschenrechte. For details see: www.faktencheckhellas.org

FCH-team: Heino Berg / Sebastian Gerhardt / Werner Ruegerner / Winfried Wolf / Mag Wompe!

Fact versus fiction – a few answers on the issue of refugees, provided by FactCheck:HELLAS

About a million refugees are expected to arrive in Germany in 2015. This is in three ways unique: It is unique in terms of numbers, though only for Germany and by no means internationally. It is unique in terms of new opportunities for creating a lively, youthful and colourful society, as is expressed by thousands of examples for the support given to refugees by members of civil society. But it is also unique in terms of the danger from across the board racism, as expressed by daily arson attacks on refugee homes in Germany. Organised racist activities are usually conducted by far-right groups. But often hundreds of "normal citizens" are taking part. And big sections of the population are openly hostile to foreigners. This right-wing mood stems from the classic, same old arguments. Below we answer seven of the most common racist claims.

Claim 1: "The boat is full – Germany cannot shoulder the flood of refugees."

Answer: Germany is not a boat. It is an averagely populated country whose population is ageing and stagnating. Even the industrial rise of Germany in the 19th century was largely based on the arrival of more than 300.000 Poles. Considering that the population size was half that of today and that the main amount of migration was based around the Ruhr-area this was a much larger migration-movement than today. After the second world war every fourth person in the GDR was a migrant from eastern regions formerly belonging to Germany; in Bavaria every fifth. Because of the languishing economy at the time this was a much higher burden than today. It was mastered. By the end of the 1960s more than two million "guest workers" from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey came to western-Germany. Today they are – mostly integrated – permanent guests. Other countries are confronted with much higher refugee numbers when compared with their respective population size: Small Libya harbours 1.1 million Syrian refugees, Turkey 1.9 million. During the last 20 years Turkey experienced the immigration of half a million Albanian speaking people. This is the equivalent of 4 million people migrating to Germany.

Claim 2: "Germany cannot shoulder all the suffering and misery in this world".

Answer: Suffering and misery are being borne by refugees. Germany profits on balance. 20 per cent of refugees have got an academic degree, a further 25 per cent have received vocational training. Also, German economic- and foreign policies are responsible for a much higher degree of suffering and misery than caused by refugees coming to Germany at this point. See pages 6/7 for more detail.



Claim 3: "Refugees receive money taken from the German population".

Answer: In 2013 refugees received an amount of 1.4 billion Euro. In 2015 this could rise to three billion Euro. This is the equivalent of a tenth of German "defence"-spending. It is the equivalent of the extra-amounts of cash spent on defence, arms and military expeditions to foreign countries since the year 2000. The latter are morally reprehensible expenditures. The former are a moral necessity. Foreigners also provide business for Germany. A person without a German passport generates 3300 Euro more in taxes than he receives in terms of state benefits. This was calculated in detail by the Sueddeutsche Zeitung on August 27th.

Claim 4: "Those coming to us are economic migrants!"

Answer: Obviously these people are taking on extreme burdens and costs in order to come here. They also know that they will not always be welcome in this country (to put it mildly). It is true, some refugees primarily come here because of economic suffering. This was always one motive for migration. Apart from the fact that such migration has to be also respected and also cannot be prevented, there is another question flowing from this: Why is economic misery so huge in these countries? One – though not the only – cause is the German "economic model". German export successes destroy local economies, thus creating suffering in other countries. The misery created by EU- and Troika-policies in Greece

have led to 50% youth unemployment, forcing tens of thousands mostly young Greeks to leave their country.

Claim 5: "Refugees are taking our jobs".

Answer: German politicians are destroying jobs in Germany by reducing public spending. This is also a result of capital concentration, a rationing away of jobs and the movement of production to other countries such as China. Migrants create new jobs in many ways, often in the small-business sector, where quite a lot of jobs are being created with relatively small amounts of capital-investment. Also, hundreds of thousands of migrants take jobs in areas where almost no people owning a German passport apply.

Claim 6: "Refugees should claim asylum where they have first entered the EU. But Italy and Greece simply let the refugees move on."

Answer: True. But the Dublin-agreement is stupid and unjust. Unjust because two exposed (and economically weak and highly indebted) countries, which happen to be the countries where most refugees land first, cannot shoulder the main burden of the refugee drama. EU-laws are also stupid because it makes sense to let refugees move on to the country they want to go to. This makes future integration easier – for example because refugees have got relatives and associates there.

Claim 7: "Some refugees can be in-

tegrated. But others do not belong into our Christian cultural sphere."

Answer: When the first Italians arrived in western-Germany the same (stupid) arguments were advanced. Later it was said about people from Turkey that "they do not fit in". Then it was migrants from the Balkan. By now several million people live in our "Christian cultural sphere" who do not belong into the "traditional" mindset. Some are integrated better, some less so. The reasons for the latter have got nothing to do with their religion, background or language. They lie in insufficient policies failing to house these people in a humane way, denying them the necessary immediate help needed for successful integration – language courses, nursery- and school-places, funding for school- and academic-education, etc. Politicians consciously refuse to do what is necessary. Almost always local city- and town-councils only get told about the imminent arrival of new migrants a few weeks before the arrival date. Almost always this or that public building is then ordered to be made ready for housing refugees. This creates chaos and promotes racism. The claim made by the German interior minister, which he maintained until the beginning of August, that 400.000 refugees were coming to Germany was irresponsible. By mid-August he had to raise this figure to 800.000. By consciously underestimating refugee-numbers, resources like housing, support-workers and school or nursery places were insufficiently prepared.

This is typical "racism in suits" barely reported in the media. It prepares the ground for all-encompassing racism and creates the seven, and other, myths countered above.

The aims of FCH and FCH publishing information

FactCheck:HELLAS is being produced in German since April 2015. Issue 5 appears in the following four languages: German, Greek, English, and Spanish. As of issue 3 FCH and issue 4 FCH is also being published as a supplement for the Greek daily EFSYN ("the journalists newspaper").

FactCheck:HELLAS aims to develop and strengthen a European and world wide solidarity movement supporting the population in Greece.

This is an international movement against austerity, a medicine dishd out by big corporations and banks leading to the impoverishment of populations, suffocating public debt and, at the same time, soaring profits for big business and banks.

A movement making the case for a world prioritising human dignity, democracy and solidarity instead of profits and financial interest. In Germany FCH is supported by around 50 prominent individuals and a dozen democratic and socialist organisations. Details are on our website: www.faktencheckhellas.org

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The left on quicksand

On the splits inside Syriza

Nikos Chilas

He regrets defeat but he can stomach it. "I won't cry over it" says former Greek agriculture minister Vangelis Apostolou assessing the recent capitulation of the Tsipras government to the creditors. "The defeat is not final. We fight on to reverse it".

We are hearing such statements not only from Syriza-ministers, but also from Syriza-MPs. Not everyone is joining in though: 23 Syriza-MPs belonging to the "Left Platform" group have set up a new party called "Popular Unity". Others are apparently prepared to follow their lead. The size of the parliamentary group, currently numbering 149 MPs, could therefore shrink further until the elections on September 20th.

Syriza itself is also suffering from the consequences of capitulation. More than 100 central committee members (more than half of the members of that body), among them secretary Tassos Koronakis, have resigned in recent weeks. Thousands have left the party. Whole party branches have dissolved themselves. The most fatal and most common form of exiting is the so called "Anachoritismós" - the path to inner exile and thus the retreat from any form of public engagement.

Syriza faces deepest trouble only two years after being founded in August 2013. Political capitulation is followed by existential crisis. The slogan advanced by the party leader is: "Get rid of the critics and win the elections." Opinion polls show the party can expect to win a relative majority albeit with strong losses compared to January 2015. Back then Syriza gained 36,8 per cent of the vote, missing an absolute majority by only two parliamentary seats – 149 of 300 in total.

Clearly the collapse of Syriza has been inherent in its organisational structure. The party evolved out of an alliance of about 15 "components", larger and smaller organisations encompassing a broad spectrum of the left – from non-Stalinist communists to left-wing social-democrats, with the left-centrist Synaspismos party under Alexis Tsipras being its main component. This structure of "components" remained intact and kept working after Syriza was founded.

However likeable and interesting this structure might have been – party unity was limited from the beginning because of this. Syriza was not prepared for a

pains". His most important followers are the former deputy-leader of government Gianis Dragasakis, the former economy minister Giorgos Stathakis as well as

September. Tsipras destroyed this plan by calling early elections. Since then they feel betrayed by him. Despite this, they declared their intent to again stand on a Syriza-platform in forthcoming elections at very urgently arranged special meeting on 29th and 30th of August. This meeting in effect replaced the planned party conference. They declared to still strive to nullify the memorandum – but only after it being fully implemented. A seldom seen case of very strong schizophrenia! Their most well known representatives are former CC-secretary Tassos Koronakis and former finance-minister Eukleidis Tsakalotos.

faced with the danger of new splits in the future. But its left-wing opponents are also treading on insecure ground. "The Greek left is currently standing on quicksand" he says. It is possible that it will sink.

Nikos Chilas lives in Berlin and Athens. He is a foreign correspondent for the Greek daily newspaper To Vima.

"Tsipras is Schaeuble's left-winger"

Tsipras is now the changed reformist, once again contesting [the elections on September 20th] liberated from the hard-liners in his own party. [...] Tsipras a left-winger, a populist? No, Tsipras is a realist and pragmatist. The country helps who helps himself. If this calculation works to the creditors' satisfaction Tsipras may be a left-winger, but he now also is Merkel's and Schaeuble's left-winger. [...] The election now serves the purpose of rounding off the power of the minister-president."

Stefan Kornelius, Sueddeutsche Zeitung, August 20th 2015

larger defeat, never mind a horrible catastrophe.

The new alliances now being constructed do not always mirror the old groupings. "Ever since Syriza came into government there has been a constant regrouping of alliances and individuals according to their position in the government- and party-apparatus and according to their analysis of the situation at the time", says the publisher of the "Paths of the Left" magazine, Michalis Siachos. In the end four main groupings have crystallised who feature some continuity with the formations they originally came from:

The people of "Proedru", the followers of "president" Alexis Tsipras such as Vangelis Apostolou who was mentioned above. They say there was no alternative to capitulation. They also point to its positive aspects: Among them the smaller primary surplus now being demanded by creditors, the 36 billion Euro allegedly being provided for investment until 2019 (in reality this is EU structural fund money that has been available for a long time now) as well as better conditions for the gigantic Greek debt. The main argument advanced by the government-camp is: Tsipras' only choice was between the agreed third programme of help with its harsh conditions (memorandum), or a default without plan. By compromising Tsipras kept the country "within the EU", gave it breathing space in order to, at a later stage, move to the offensive. The vast majority of Syriza-MPs, around 90 to 100 of them, still stand behind Tsipras – although, as is said all over the place – with "stomach

former home secretary Nikos Voutsis.

The "left platform" under former energy minister Panajiotis Lafazanis, from which "Popular Unity" has recently emerged. It accused Tsipras of having capitulated without need at a decisive moment during the negotiations with the creditors. He lost his most important trump-card because of this, the "Ochi" (no) of the referendum on July 5th where 61.3 per cent of the population decisively voted against creditors demands. For Lafazanis Syriza has already mutated into into a party of the system, administrating the memorandum under left-wing auspices. The Eurozone in its current neo-liberal state is not considered to be reformable. A return to the old national currency, the Drachma, is also considered to be necessary with a Grexit, Greece's exodus from the Euro, deemed to be essential. Such statements have earned Popular Unity the nickname "party of the Drachma". Tsipras even accuses it of being an agent of Wolfgang Schaeuble because he too demanded a Grexit at one point. The most important points of the Popular Unity programme are, apart from opposing the memorandum, the nationalisation of the banks and to stop servicing the debt. Its most well known exponent next to Lafazanis is economics professor Kostas Lapavistas.

"The 53 plus". The name of this group derives from the number of its members on the Syriza-CC. They opposed Tsipras' agreement with the creditors and are demanding the nullification of the memorandum. Their aim was to get these demands passed at a special conference planned for the end of

"AKOA" (Renewed Communist Ecologic Left). They have criticised the "right wing" policies of the Tsipras government from the start. They are opposed to Syriza splitting but consider the erosion of the party to be irreversible because, they say, the members of government have become a social-democratic force. In order to get out of the current dead end they call for the formation of a popular movement capable of appealing beyond class lines, aiming to get rid of memorandum and Eurozone. Four MPs are affiliated to AKOA. Their most prominent member is Rudi Rinaldi.

Between these four main groupings there are several other groups inside the party who play quite an important role in the formation of alliances.

At the same time fringe-groups and movements to the left of Syriza are coming into play. Among them are "Plan B" (=Return to the Drachma) of Alekos Alavanos (the former Synaspismos leader and "discoverer" of Tsipras) and Antarsya. Alavanos has already entered an alliance with Lafazanis. The Antarsya group which is more radical than "Plan B" currently wavers between an alliance with Popular Unity and standing independently.

The Greek left is therefore as divided as rarely before. Tsipras on his part has promised not to wage a "fratricidal war" against his former comrades during the election campaign.

Perspectives are not rosy at all – even after another Tsipras victory. "The new Syriza-government will face new and insurmountable difficulties every day", prophesises Siachos. The party will be

Vio.Me: Self-organisation under workers control threatened!

The workforce at the Thessalonian self-organised biological cleaning agent factory was compelled to issue an extraordinary statement on August 25th 2015 in which they voiced concerns about the safety of the fighting workers at the Vio.ME plant (see report in FCH03). The project is acutely threatened by a new court order which defines Vio.Me – the construction materials factory abandoned by its owners in May 2011 – "as a bankrupt company for which a bankruptcy administrator has been ordered". Attempts to legalise the self-management practices carried out by the workers who, having not received any wages for a year, decided to occupy the factory have failed so far. There are indications that an "inspection" is planned by the insolvency administrator. He could in this case be joined by police. The workers could be declared to be illegal squatters. They could be forced to leave the factory facing the threat of arrest! Colleagues therefore call on "all collectives and activists who were at the side of VIO.ME since the beginning to prepare immediately for the defence of the project". Internationally this necessitates protests and solidarity declarations at very short notice! The LabourNet Germany editors are in contact with the workforce. Any news and background information will be published here: <http://www.labournet.de/?p=10220>

Three views from inside Syriza

After the Syriza leader and minister president and a majority of Syriza-MPs agreed to the new memorandum a fierce debate developed inside the party, the content of which is summed up by Nikos Chilas on page 3. On this page we reproduce short statements representing the views of three Syriza-currents currently present in parliament: The first statement puts forward the majority position among Syriza-MPs. The second contribution documents basic views of the left wing split-off "Popular Unity" written by Elena Psarrea, an MP from Messinia. The third statement represents the views of the "centrist group" ("the 53+").



"The left will not give up"

Nikos Filis, leader of the SYRIZA parliamentary group

The bet is of decisive importance and also hurts. After its huge and unequal battle with the dominant neo-liberal policy in Europe, after being defeated by the powerful in Brussels and Berlin, but also after preventing a Grexit – a catastrophic economic and geo-political adventure to be forced on Greece by Schaeuble and co. - the SYRIZA government has now lost its parliamentary majority.

It lost its majority because its own comrades decided on another path for Greece. In favour of Grexit and a return to a national currency, without a plan which could keep a society torn by five years of cuts and recession on its feet.

This is how we enter the election campaign. With less illusions than on January 15th when we hoped to build a barrier against destructive neo-liberalism in a small European country and with a left-wing government.

With greater determination to broaden the splits on the hard, fossilized European ground created by our struggle in the previous months. We hope to soon gain allies in this fight, after the autumn elections in southern countries like Spain and Portugal.

But we especially enter this election campaign in the belief that SYRIZA will be able, even in this extremely hostile environment, to defend the weakest. In the belief that we can put the country back onto its feet. There will be a high price to pay, but we are determined to share it out on the shoulders of the rich. For the first time since the crisis broke out corruption, the interests of the rich and the tax avoiders will have to face a determined opponent.

The left will not give up. It has no right to give up. Support for SYRIZA from the European left is indispensable. We need to feel that comrades in the whole of Europe support our struggle for more social justice, for small victories over austerity policies. We need their support during negotiations over the question of debt beginning in October.

And we are confident that the European left will continue to coordinate all our forces in the political arena and in society in the weeks ahead, to soften the enormous problem of the floods of migrants and refugees together, based on solidarity and a respect for human rights. We will fight together against racism and the national egoisms strengthening the radical-right on our continent.

"We have conquered fear"

Elena Psarrea, member of parliament and candidate in Messinia, Popular Unity.

The aim of Popular Unity is to create a colourful and broad alliance of the radical-left, making a determined case against the memorandum. It calls on the large group of those people who have said "no" on July 5th: the workers who are the great majority of the population, the farmers whose existence is being destroyed by the 3. memorandum, the self-employed and the middle class who especially suffer from this crisis, the unemployed, the young women and men who live under dreadful conditions and are being forced to leave the country, the women who suffer disproportionately from the consequences of the memoranda.

Together with all these women and men belonging to this social spectrum, with social movement activists, with groups being confronted with discrimination and social injustice, we want to create a strong social and political alliance to organise social resistance against the memoranda, anchoring it practically within the whole of society.

The social majority has put one issue firmly onto the political agenda: The consequences of the crisis cannot be tolerated any more. The social majority can no longer live with rigid austerity and ever new memoranda. This demand can only be enforced through confrontation with the Eurozone – a Eurozone whose policy is bound up with austerity. One-sided measures are necessary to break this vicious circle. They have to lead to the nationalisation of the banks, the socialisation of important businesses and the one-sided cancellation of the debt in conjunction with taxes on big business. The slogan "no sacrifices for the Euro!" basically means: The Euro is not only a currency, it is also a political programme whose reason of existence is the constant reproduction of harsh neo-liberalism and intensive capitalist exploitation, leading to inequality between the European national economies and policies of counter-reform at the expense of the working classes.

The election campaign begins with the creditors demanding to implement the memorandum without any delay, so that not a single day of recession and poverty is lost.

The most convincing argument is reality itself. Nothing is stronger but the will of young people to reject the policies of blackmail and lack of perspectives.

Position of the 53+

Excerpt from the declaration of the group of the 53+, August 30th

The elections on September 20th 2015 are an important staging post for the country and the left, for Syriza. They are also an important event for the European left which, despite the impotence following the rapid developments after the referendum, continues to observe the Greek left and its attempts to once more assume the responsibility of government.

This however will be a staging post with different content, with a different stake than was the case during the elections of January 25th. Time is short, the obstacles are big. But we are duty bound, all of us, to organise this battle with a view of winning a one-party government for Syriza. We have to prevent SYRIZA from forming a government with parties whose programme is not compatible with Syriza's programme.

At the same time we have to develop an alternative and a convincing programme – which we did not have before – with the preparation and participation of society and a sincere cooperation with the European left. A programme showing a way out of memoranda and neo-liberal one-way streets.

The decision made by the government leadership - which at times also speaks as the party leadership - to not hold the extraordinary congress already decided upon by the central committee, carried by a huge majority, was a mistake. We are already witnessing the dramatic consequences among party members and the youth organisation. Resignations on a grand scale and at all levels (members of parliament, central committee members, at local government level and within the party) are being recorded.

Those leaving have selflessly fought during this whole past period. We will not forget this. We will work hard to prevent fratricidal strife to keep effective channels of communication open. The idea of unity and reconstitution of the left with a radical direction oriented towards the movements has to be kept alive.

In view of these facts the leadership has to practice self-criticism and begin an immediate turn. The signal given to the rank-and-file member or the friend of the party, especially during the last seven months, has unfortunately been that his sole task is to follow government decisions and to support them in the public arena.

[...] The parties of the left are not being shaped by their leading representatives but by values, ideas, programmes and the struggles of human beings.

German bosses' newspaper says: "Greek debts are unbearable"

"Even the IMF [...] considers the future Greek debt burden to be simply unbearable. The Greek debt mountain has reached 330 billion Euro or 170 per cent of its economic performance already. This amount threatens to rise to more than 200 per cent due to the new rescue package. The European stability pact officially only allows for a debt ratio of 60%. [...] Should Greece turn the agreed reforms into reality the question about how the country will earn the money to repay its crushing debt burden in the coming decades remains. [...] The new billions set aside to help Greece do not provide for concrete investment projects. The third reform programme is a restructuring programme, as were the two programmes preceding it. The third rescue package is under threat of becoming a grand illusion."

Sven Afhueppe in: Handelsblatt, August 19th, 2015

Refuges keep coming despite deterrence and risks to their lives!

The situation in Greece is escalating on a daily basis. The masses of arrivals have pushed aside several national and European laws and programmes already. This is the immediate demand: For a fundamental turnaround in European policies concerning refugees! In Idomeni at the border to Macedonia, 2000 refugees simply ran past 50 armed police officers who had been shooting at them with tear-gas and flash-bang grenades only a day before. German MP Heike Haensel gives an impressive report about the inhuman conditions on the northern-Greek island of Lesbos (page 8). EFSYN-journalist Dimitris Angelis

surveys the rapid increase of refugee numbers and contrasts this with the meagre amounts of new EU-money handed over to Greece. Angelidis and Tsartanis also publish reports made by refugees concerning strange accidents on land and at sea in dire need of explanation. Katharina Stamm, legal expert for the "Diakonisches Werk" of the Evangelic Church in Germany explains what the turnaround demanded here has to look like. (see box).
Dorothee Vakali

No more deaths on murderous refugee-routes!



About the current situation facing refugees in Greece

Picture: Refugees simply walk past border police officers.. By Vasilis Tsartanis

Dimitris Angelidis (EFSYN newspaper) and Dorothee Vakalis

Owohl die vorherige Regierung ausThe Greek government is waging a desperate battle against time and against empty state-coffers, in an attempt to remedy huge shortcomings and failings in the areas of housing and provision for refugees and migrants.

According to a UNHCR report from August 14th the amount of people from Turkey arriving on the Aegean Islands has reached 158.468 in the first half of 2015 already. On the land route in the area of Evros 1.716 were recorded. During the same period about 85.000 people stranded on Italian shores. And it is clear already that numbers will increase in coming months. 50.242 arrivals were recorded in July alone. This surpasses the amount for the whole of 2014. Then, "only" 43.500 were recorded.

The previous government of Nea Demokratia and PASOK pledged to set up 1500 new living spaces for refugees until the end of 2014. But not a single new place was provided. It placed political emphasis on building and running closed prison centres instead. These were refugee prisons holding people without papers, often for longer than the legally allowed period of 18 months. The number of those imprisoned has not been published – we guess it must be far more than 10.000. These prisons were mainly about deterrence – but futile! Also, that government did not fulfil its duty to the European Commissi-

on to present it with a financial plan by October 2014. this would have enabled it to receive money from the EU fund for asylum, migration and home security. Thus an oppressive logjam developed under the Syriza-government in 2015. The ministry of migration under Tasia Christodopoulou made the necessary requests soon after assuming office at the end of January.

The European Commission has now announced that it will provide Greece with 470 Million Euro for the areas of migration and refugees during the next five years. Deterrence is still the main objective. The financial amount may be larger than during the previous five years (then, 386 million Euro were paid for the period between 2008 and 2013), but in the face of an enormous increase in refugee numbers it is felt to be completely insufficient in Greece. And this despite UNHCR demands for an immediate increase in Greek efforts to register and accommodate refugees. With what money? EU-money will probably not be paid out before the end of September this year. Until then, basic provision for the enormous stream of refugees will mainly have to come from civil society solidarity groups and from meagre local government resources. (see page 8). On most islands – apart from Kos – local councils have expressed their desire to help.

Because the necessary staff-numbers for a fast and effective registration-process do not exist, refugees are forced to desperately wait on the islands in their thousands, often for up to 20 days. They

sleep on streets, places, in parks and empty hotels, without any basic supplies. Due to the end of the holiday season the ferries are mostly booked up by tourists, creating a further problem of transfer to the mainland. Greek ferries have so far made enormous profits from refugees. In recent days the government has chartered the Eleftherios Venizelos ferry to take 2500 refugees to Piraeus each trip. The refugees have to pay for their own tickets (45 Euro per person).

In Athens the situation is depressive as well. Around 700 people are camping in Pedion tou Areous, the largest park in the city. This provoked enormous media-interest, so the government, working together with the city of Athens set up a first open refugee camp on communal grounds in the district of Elaiones. Despite financial problems (there was lack of money for tents, air conditioning systems were donated by private companies) this cooperation of state, city council and civil society succeeded in setting up a camp in accordance with international standards, thus paving a way for similar projects on the islands. This way the situation can at least be alleviated a bit.

But now there is the emerging threat of huge "reception areas" to be set up by the EU. One is supposed to be built in Piraeus. The first one is already under construction in the Sicilian city of Catania. Huge refugee camps, financed by the EU, are also being planned for areas outside the EU – for example in Turkey.

These camps, partly resembling prisons, are supposed to deter refugees,

therefore continuing inhuman EU refugee policies. Europe takes any chance of integration and of leading a dignified life away from refugees and their children by interning them in their thousands while stopping them from travelling "into Europe". This is developing into a huge challenge for civil society. Developments have to be watched closely and, together with refugees, sharp demands have to be made: humanitarian visa, legal access to and the right to claim

asylum in a country of choice. The refugee question especially will be decisive for the future of Greece and Europe.

Coalition demands: "Legal entry for war refugees into a country of their choice! They come despite deterrence and danger for their lives!"

A broad coalition of associations, refugee- and lawyers organisations is calling on the German government to campaign for a wholly new policy direction concerning the taking of responsibility for refugees. This call has been made in a new memorandum called "for the right to freely choose a country of refuge within the EU – respect for the interests of refugees". The following organisations are part of this coalition: PRO ASYL, Diakonie Deutschland, Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband, Arbeiterwohlfahrt, Jesuiten-Flüchtlingsdienst, Deutscher Anwaltsverein, Republikanische Anwältinnen- und Anwaltsverein, Neue Richtervereinigung und die Bundesrechtsberaterkonferenz.

They make the case for the right to freely choose a country of refuge. Asylum seekers must be allowed to decide for themselves where in the EU they want to claim asylum. Refugees who are already recognized as being in need of protection should be granted freedom of movement within the EU. In addition, countries primarily facing humanitarian migration should be supported by a European assistance fund.

The refugee-question has led to a worrying increase of national egoisms throughout the EU. But in the current situation solidarity action is urgently needed. Refugees are facing insufferable conditions in a number of EU-countries. In countries like Greece, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria asylum seekers are being made homeless and mistreated. In many cases they are being imprisoned in direct contravention of international law.

The principle of free choice would enable refugees to go where they want to, so that they can receive support from their families and communities. This would for the first time take care of the interests of asylum seekers. It would mean that they could find better orientation and integration from the beginning. Human rights violations could be prevented this way.

The organisations identify the reason for the present crisis of the Dublin-system in the "principle of origin" which places the main responsibility for taking care of refugees on the shoulders of EU-border states. According to the Dublin-treaty, a country failing to prevent a refugee from entering is responsible for dealing with his asylum claim. Most refugees enter a country by irregular means as there is a lack of legal entry-routes.

The organisers criticise the intermingling of border- and refugee policies: Conditions for a hostile climate towards refugees are being created as long as having to take responsibility for them is considered to be a "punishment". In contrast to this the signatory-organisations demand that taking in refugees is being seen as a human achievement and a humanitarian commandment.

Katharina Stamm, deaconry of evangelical churches

The drama and miracle of Idomeni

Dimitris Angelis, EFSYN and Vasilis Tsartanis

The Greek refugee drama continues in the northern-Greek border town of IDOMENI. More than 2000 people were waiting to be allowed through on August 21st. 150 people had returned the previous day, having been robbed and battered by gangs. Macedonia had declared a state of emergency, closing its borders. Thousands more arrived during the following hours, including those shipped to Piraeus on a boat chartered by the government. Armed border police tried to intimidate the huge crowd, using

barbed wire, tear gas and flashbang grenades. It rained strongly throughout the night. The few remaining volunteers could not cope, the right-wing local council was absent, highly paid UNHCR-officials went to bed. Then, on August 22nd, the "miracle of Idomeni": countless numbers of refugees got organised and simply ran past the border guards and their armoured vehicles towards the next train station in Gevjelia. The exhausted remained. The border is open again now. Groups of 50 to 100 people

painfully drag themselves to the next village. Conclusion: Legal and secure travel with visa has to be implemented as quickly as possible throughout Europe! This demand is also being put forward by Annette Groth, Left Party MP, and Prof. Josef Weidenholzer, member of the European Parliament and vice president of the social-democratic parliamentary group in the EP. Both visited Idomeni and the border to Serbia on August 29th and 30th.

Translation: Dorothee Vakalis

Reasons for fleeing



**Four migration streams –
four times western responsibility –
four times German guilt**

Flüchtlinge in der Nähe der griechisch-serbischen Grenze. Foto: G. Christakis

When looking at the kind of refugees reaching German territory to claim asylum, four great contingents can be identified. These make up $\frac{3}{4}$ of migration: The by far largest contingent – about 40 per cent – comes from the Balkans, especially from Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Serbia. The second largest contingent consists of Syrian refugees (22 per cent). The third group are migrants from Afghanistan and Pakistan (7%), followed by – fourthly – African refugees (Libya, Nigeria, Eritrea, Tunisia), who together make up a further six per cent. All of them have got reasons to flee, reasons for which the West as a whole and the German government especially do bear great responsibility.

The Balkans

A few weeks ago, Thuringian minister president Bodo Ramelow, member of the Left Party, pointed out the main causes of the Balkan-tragedy: "20 years ago, Germany rather hastily and unilaterally recognised the states of Croatia and Slovenia, thus accelerating the wars in former Yugoslavia." (SZ 25. 8.). From the end of the 1940s until 1990 there at least existed a Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, enabling peoples who had previously waged war on one another for more than a century, such as Croats and Serbians, to co-exist more or less peacefully for a period of four decades. After 1990, the EU and the USA tried their level best to destroy this successful federation by ratcheting up old tensions. Inside Yugoslavia itself, this met with the interests of nationalists like Milosevic in Belgrade and Tadjman in Zagreb. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia broke apart. More than a million refugees were

the result. More than 350.000 people came to Germany alone. In 1999 the Kosovo war started with NATO attacking Serbia. This was triggered by a massacre in Racak on January 15th 1999 - it is still unclear who was responsible – and the draft treaty of Rambouillet which was presented to the Serbian government in an ultimate fashion. Part of the draft read as follows: "NATO-personnel will be granted free and unhindered passage throughout the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia". Clearly, Belgrad was never going to be able to agree to such a treaty. The objective was reached. NATO bombed Serbia for weeks, destroying infrastructure all over the place. This was an open breach of international law. Former chancellor Helmut Schmidt stated: "Following the leash of the USA we violated international law and the UN charter. (Frankfurter Rundschau, April 4th 1999)

These were the stated war aims: To achieve peaceful development for the population and economic prosperity for Kosovo based on a market economy and western help.

What does the balance sheet look like one and a half decades later? Today, Kosovo is the poorest region in the whole of Europe – with 70 per cent youth unemployment it even breaks the EU-record of Greece. Serbia fares little better. The country shelters 223.000 "internal refugees", the victims of wars and persecution on the Balkans (for which the Serbian side bears a good chunk of responsibility). When asked the question "do you hope to be able to leave the country soon?" 55 per cent of the Kosovan population answer with "yes". It probably is a sad European record that a majority of that country's population

wants to leave it as fast as possible.

The remaining states existing today within the territory of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia can be divided up into two groups: On one side there are countries like Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Like Serbia and Kosovo, these four countries are characterized by economic misery and deeply rooted corruption. On the other side there are Slovenia and Croatia, two new EU member states who have experienced a certain upswing, albeit financed by a speeding process of rising debt levels, comparable to Greek development before 2010.

When taken together the balance sheet of western intervention on the Balkans since 1990 has been a disaster for local people.

Syria

The second largest contingent of refugees reaching Germany – the second largest even in Europe as a whole, following the Afghan contingent – is the result of the Syrian civil war that began in 2011. The country is ruled by the Alawis clan under Baschar al-Assad. He is at the top of an authoritarian regime which suppresses the opposition and Kurdish minorities, who are often persecuted and threatened with torture and death. The regime is traditionally closely allied with Iran and Russia. In early 2011 a mass movement based on civil society began against the Assad government. Its central demands were for democratic freedoms and cultural self-determination for the Kurds. There were no demands to bring down the regime at first. Assad reacted with concessions and selective oppression. After only a few months the conflict escalated. Parts of the opposi-

tion began an armed struggle, soon supported by the west with arms shipments. The regime fought back. Since then there has been an ongoing spiral of militarisation of conflict and the Islamisation of the opposition. At the same time the democracy movement was marginalised. The west – represented by Gulf state dictatorships, Saudi Arabia and Turkey – armed and supported oppositional militia forces, among them the forerunners of IS and the terror groups of IS themselves. The German government also provided support for dubious opposition groups – disguised as foreign aid. A few months ago the governments in Washington, Riyadh and Ankara began to partially change direction. The ghost they had released from the bottle was to be bombed back into it – but it is probably too late for that.

The situation confronting the Kurdish population is especially tragic. Their militias bear a huge proportion of the burden in the fight against IS. They have established a model of society based on democracy and openness in the areas liberated by them. Which is why they are hated so much not only by IS but also the Turkish government. Right now, there is a new chance for a peaceful solution due to a Russian-Iranian initiative. But the formerly wealthy and well structured country has been bombed into the dust. The healthcare system has largely broken down. The majority of the 21-million strong population has fled – nine million of them within Syria itself. Four million have fled into neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon and Turkey, and last but not least into Europe.

Since the civil war began the west has described Assad as a despot needing to be removed. Many peace efforts fail as

a result because the toppling of Assad is declared to be a precondition. What never gets mentioned is this: There has been a close relationship between the regime and the west, lasting for more than a decade. This convenient alliance was forged after 9/11 to fight "terrorism". But there was even more: High ranking German politicians visited Syria and nice Mr. Assad to enhance the standing of the regime: In 2000, chancellor Gerhard Schroeder received an audience. Former and current German foreign minister Walter Steinmeier visited Damascus in 2006. Between 2000 and 2008 the German government supported the regime to the tune of 150 million Euro. It did in Syria what it refused to do in Greece – the Regime received a debt cut of 75 per cent. There was another area where the USA and Germany on the one hand and Syria on the other cooperated closely: Torture! The USA kidnapped terror suspects and delivered them to Syrian torturers – expecting to profit from their especially brutal "methods of questioning". This is documented in detail by the case of German citizen Mohamed Haydar Zammar. He was arrested by Moroccan security forces while visiting the country on December 12th 2001. He was "transferred" to Damascus with the help of US- and German secret services. According to research of the "Stern" - magazine (March 11th 2008) "four members of the German secret service and one police officer travelled to Syria with Steinmeier's blessing in November 2002. They used the opportunity to cross-examine Zammar in the presence of Syrian guards." Zammar was released in 2013. Despite torture, he was never proven to be a terrorist. Zammar's case was no isolated incident. Syrian dun-

geons were, says the "Stern", "torture chambers for the civilised west".

Afghanistan

East and west bear responsibility for war and refugee numbers in more or less equal proportion. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, ruling the country militarily for a decade. During this period the west, especially the USA, delivered weapons to the resistance increasingly dominated by Islamism. The first fundamentalist terror warriors were created this way. As the Soviets retreated, western backed criminal warlords and misogynistic Islamists, the Taliban among them, took power in Kabul. After the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11th, partially masterminded from Afghanistan, the western war against the Taliban-regime started. The war itself was quick. But the country has de facto been occupied by western forces for 15 years now. Officially, foreign troops are supposed to withdraw from the country in coming years; the German army in 2016. The balance sheet of western occupation is as devastating as that of the previous soviet occupation. The country is exhausted and destroyed after 35 years of war. Islamist terrorist militias are as strong as before the US invasion. Once western military withdrawal is completed the usurpation of power by fundamentalist militias is going to be on the order of the day.

The human rights situation in the country is miserable. It is a catastrophe for women. A huge part of the Afghan population has fled the country, living in emigration. Neighbouring states like Pakistan and Iran carry the main burden of this migration (in both these countries alone there are 2.5 million Afghans). But Afghan refugees represent a huge section of asylum seekers and illegal arrivals in Germany and the EU.

German taxpayers spent more than 12 billion Euro to finance the German military presence in Afghanistan, although up to 75 per cent of the population oppose this mission. The German army is responsible for one of the greatest massacres that took place there: In Kundus, 100 civilians were killed by German bombs on September 4th 2009. The German army ordered this bombing claiming that Taliban fighters were going to be hit. Georg Klein, the officer in charge of this "tanker-massacre", was promoted to the position of brigade general. The name of the defence minister responsible back then was Thomas de Maiziere. He is the current interior minister and as such responsible for refugees – Afghan refugees among them.

Northern Africa and Libya

A huge number of refugees reach Europe via Libya where they plan to cross the sea. 10.000 people have drowned so far attempting to take this route. Because of western bombing Libya became a major transit country for refugees in 2011. As a result of this war, Libya has got no functioning state machine today. Some of the refugees arriving in Europe this way are Libyans. The overwhelming majority are refugees from other African states, however. For them, Libya is the departure point for the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean.

The Libyan tragedy began with a peaceful mass movement as well. In early 2011 - as part of the "Arabic spring"

- it called for democratic rights in opposition of the autocratic Gaddafi-regime. Like in Syria, this soon developed into a military confrontation. The west provided the opposition with arms. Shortly after, and using the pretext of wanting to protect civilians, an intensive bombing campaign was launched by the USA, Britain and France. As in Yugoslavia tens of thousands of air raids destroyed a large part of the country's infrastructure – among them waterworks, power plants, TV-stations, food depots and refineries. Libya became a testing ground for new military gear. The German Financial Times wrote on April 18th 2011: "It is a cynical aspect of this conflict that the desert state is becoming a testing ground for many fighter jets whose producers are competing over major contracts. [...] Six types of aircraft from the USA, Russia and Europe are in the race. The European competitors of Euro-fighter, Rafale and Gripen are now bombing together with the USA. [...] The usually militarily reluctant Swedes who are not part of NATO have sent their Gripen-jets. [...] In contrast to the Rafale this is the first time [...] that this machine, developed for dogfights, is attacking ground targets using laser supported bombs."

The regime was toppled; Gaddafi murdered. Since then the country is being ruled over, or better, terrorised by competing and warring militias.

Like Assad, Gaddafi was also being presented as evil dictator. The west had been working closely with him since 2003 at least. This collaboration only ended shortly before the beginning of the civil war. There was a close cooperation with Frontex to prevent the movement of refugees. The German-French arms manufacturer EADS provided the regime with modern weapons and had its own office in Tripoli until the beginning of the bombing campaign.

German support for Gaddafi goes back even further. In the 1980s German company Imhausen-Chemie and the state-owned company Salzgitter AG in conjunction with other west-German companies delivered strategically vital building parts for the construction of a gas-producing chemical weapons factory in the Libyan town of Rabta. On January 2nd 1989 the then very influential William Safire wrote in the New York Times: "One might think that this generation of Germans, aware of the guilt of their fathers in the gassing of millions not so long ago, would be particularly sensitive to the prospect of complicity in the murder by gas of civilians by a terrorist state today." In the following weeks enormous pressure generated by world opinion mounted on the German government. German parliament debated the issue several times, for example on January 18th and February 17th 1989. A certain Wolfgang Schaeuble, then "minister for special tasks" had to attempt to defend the actions of his government, trying to cover up the affair. After news reports in the international media it became ever clearer that the project of building a poison-gas factory in Libya had been known by individual government members and the German secret service BND for several years. It is almost certain that at least elements of the state apparatus secretly supported this undertaking – two companies involved were state owned: Salzgitter and Preussag.

The then government led by Helmut Kohl could well have stumbled over this

affair ... But then, just a few weeks later in the spring of 1989, the crisis in eastern Europe and the GDR came to a head. Unification happened, clouding over all other issues in world- and German politics... However, this also led to the USA starting a new Iraq-war in 1990, with former US-president George Bush commenting: "We create a new world order". Precisely. A new, old, world order based on wars, destruction and mass-exodus.

Oh. One question remains. Could things have been different? Were there alternatives for these four regions of crisis who are the sources of today's mass migration? Yes, there were. And it is telling that the west did not support any of them. Does anyone remember Ibrahim Rugova, president of Kosovo between 1992 and 1998? He wanted a peaceful movement in the struggle for self-determination against Serbian oppression. The west was not interested and supported the KLA terror gang instead. Even today it builds the core of today's truly corrupt government in Kosovo. As stated above, democracy movements against the authoritarian rule of Assad and Gaddafi existed in Syria and Libya as well. There were many attempts and proposals to achieve peace, made by the UN among others. But EU- and US governments preferred to send weapons and wage war instead.

This is how it is these days: Germany delivered submarines to Israel. These can be equipped with nuclear weapons.



This to a country responsible for several aggressive wars in Lebanon and the Gaza-strip, causing floods of refugees. Germany has been arming Turkey for years (in alternation with arms exports to Greece). Since 2012 Turkey has been attacking Syrian troops repeatedly. The German army has positioned highly efficient Patriot-rockets at the Turkish/Syrian border. These can provide backup for a larger Turkish attack on the Syrian army. Meanwhile, Turkish fighter jets are attacking IS-positions and Kurdish positions in Syria and northern-Iraq. The fuse of the powder keg in the region has been lit. Germany has also been systematically arming the regime in Riyadh which crushed a peaceful mass movement in Bahrain and is now preparing to invade Yemen, starting another mayor war. This would cause new treks involving tens of thousands of refugees marching towards securer regions.

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"Your factories force us to flee"

On August 20th 2015 German newspaper "taz" printed a very enlightening interview with Nigerian refugee Rex Osa. Osa fled to Germany in 2005. We reproduce an excerpt below.

Taz: Mr. Osa, you are planning protests against the German arms industry over the coming weekend. What does this have to do with you being a refugee?

Rex Osa: Were there no weapons in my country I would be able to challenge the politicians from the point of view of opposition. I cannot do this now. Arms producers are supporting corrupt regimes and therefore exploitation and plunder. There is a long history of this in Nigeria. Right now there is the threat of war with Boko Haram. Where do all these weapons in the hands of the Jihadists come from? Nigeria doesn't produce any. Our message is: If you produce instruments of violence or if you exploit the economy of a country you produce refugees. This is what we will paint onto our banner for the demonstration.

Taz: What are your plans for the protests?

Rex Osa: We will organise rallies in front of the weapons factories of Diehl in Ueberlingen, Movag in Kreuzlingen and ATM in Konstanz. Movag for instance produces armoured vehicles going to Saudi-Arabia, where soldiers have fired out of such vehicles at demonstrators in Bahrain. ATM produces computers and software for KMW-tanks like the Leopard 2. These are shipped for example to Qatar or Turkey. Diehl participates in the construction and marketing the Predator-drone with which the USA have killed hundreds of people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Libya and Jemen among others. Another issue is the bigotry of those claiming to help the refugees.

Taz: How so?

Rex Osa: We do not like the direction the help is taking that is becoming increasingly fashionable. The reasons why people are having to flee are not being discussed. People offer humanitarian aid without considering the fact that they themselves are also a cause of the problem.

Diehl provides 80% of the tax income for the city of Ueberlingen. There are 200 volunteers helping refugees in the same city. We wish to confront them with the infrastructure of arms exports. Most of them know about this problem. But instead of doing something about it they rather give a little bit of help to refugees. They explicitly want to be non-political. This goes as far as one person from Caritas saying things like: "Our refugees need quiet". No, we don't. We need these people to ensure that less weapons are being exported from their cities. [...] We expect people wishing to help refugees to realise this. If they don't they act in a paternalistic fashion. They keep us in our place as victims.

German support for Saddam Hussein

Iraqi refugees make up 5 per cent of all migration to Germany. There is not enough space to deal with this crisis- and war ridden country in more detail. Only that much: The Hussein-regime, now condemned by the west, was supported by the west in the same way as Assad in Syria, Gaddafi in Libya and the first Islamic warriors in Afghanistan. When Iraq attacked Iran in 1980-1988, the west provided massive arms exports to the regime in Baghdad. In 1987, during that war, Hussein used gas against the Kurdish population in Iraq. In Halabja he ordered the gassing of 5000 Kurds. This was even admitted by the Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Asis a year later. He qualified this with the words: "You live on a civilised, peaceful continent. You therefore surely have different values." He uttered these cynical remarks during a press conference in Bonn in July 1988. A day later the Bonn-government, then led by chancellor Helmut Kohl, underwrote another guarantee for new weapons deliveries to Iraq. (Frankfurter Rundschau July 2nd 1988)

When the US-government prepared for the invasion of Iraq in 1990 a small problem emerged. A considerable element of the modern Iraqi military arsenal (such as rockets of the type "Roland") came from German manufacturers. And until the beginning of 1990 Iraqi trainee officers studied rocket science at the German army academy in Munich. The US-government helpfully pulled a cloak of silence over this issue. But Bonn had to pay for this. After the war the German government transferred 16.9 billion Deutsche Mark into US bank accounts to help financing the costs of the war – apparently the German contribution helped to cover 20% of the total.

EU fails – while local help impresses

Report from a solidarity journey to Lesbos

Heike Hänsel



Even as the great ferry reaches the port of Mytilene numerous groups of refugees become visible. They sit on the ground, waiting for the continuation of their journey. The refugees buy their own tickets, at a cost of 46 Euro per person. The refugees of Lesbos alone have created an additional income of two million Euro for the ferries. Our group has come to Greece as part of a solidarity initiative for refugees organised by the "Gesellschaft für eine Kultur des Friedens (society for a culture of peace) based in Tuebingen. It soon becomes clear that as on Kos and Chios, there is no real provision for refugees on Lesbos. Everything is makeshift and improvised. Spyros Galinos, the mayor of Mytilene, tells us that by now up to 1000 refugees reach Lesbos each day, hailing from the nearby Turkish mainland in rubber dinghies. The authorities cannot cope. At some point up to 8000 refugees were staying on Lesbos. The mayor complains that EU help is still pending. The only thing built with EU-money is a "refugee prison" worth eight million Euro. It is also known as "Greek Guantanamo". 800 people were detained there. Its doors were opened again when the Samaras-government came to an end. Because of this the EU now demands 7 million Euro as a repayment from the Greek government! Mayor Galinos: "Had the Mytilene city council received these 8 million directly we could have built refugee camps for a lot more people instead of this high security prison surrounded by NATO barbed wire!" He asks us to carry his plea to Germany: "For many people Lesbos represents hope for a better life. The Greek islands need support. We cannot and do not want to organise the building of a wall around Europe."

Main points of access are the city of Molivos in the north and the beaches surrounding the capital Mytilene. Until recently there have not even been any

means of transport for people landing in Molivos. They had to walk 40 Kilometres on foot (!) in the soaring heat, crossing the mountains to Mytilene where registration is taking place. The situation confronting these completely exhausted people fleeing to Europe from the war torn regions of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan is inhumane. There is a lack of everything. Especially for young women and families with children the accommodation in camps under open skies, often without sufficient shade, is completely unacceptable. As part of our solidarity activities we used our donated money to buy urgently needed milk powder and baby food, but also a whole lot of water bottles and food, among other things. We distributed everything at the refugee camps of Kara Tepe and Moria as well as directly at the port, with the situation of many babies and small children being extremely precarious. Because of rigid EU-austerity the authorities have a lack of money and personnel for registering refugees and providing humanitarian aid. Even jobs have been cut. This means there are only three people working three shifts who are responsible for registering refugees. New arrivals have to wait for hours throughout the night in front of the police station.

We were impressed by private solidarity initiatives. In Mytilene there is the communal "Village for all Together" network set up as early as the onset of the economic crisis to support impoverished Greek families. It now also provides refugees with the most basic necessities. The current situation is discussed at weekly evening meetings.

The European movement "Welcome2Europe" is also present and has now organised its second international solidarity youth camp. One key aspect of the work is taking care of unaccompanied under-age refugees. The initiative informs arriving refugees about their rights and distributes multi-lingual pamphlets

containing important information.

In Molivos, an international team of volunteers has started to organise primary support for arriving refugees. This is by far not enough. The authorities of Mytilene are fearful that the situation will come to a head by the end of August and September, when all ferries to Athens are going to be fully booked. Meanwhile hundreds of people have been waiting for days at the harbour of Mytilene.

Now Greece is supposed to receive EU-money from AMIF, the "Fund for Asylum and Migration", until 2020. Its stated aim is this though: "AMIF finances support national efforts [...] to increase the efficiency of repatriation program-

mes". The dominating policy is still to shut down the fortress and send people back. Workers for the International Organisation of Migration IOM on Lesbos are handing out leaflets detailing opportunities and advice for return journeys to refugees who have often been travelling for months to get here. What cynicism!

Whilst buying several shopping trolleys worth of baby food we talked to a shop-worker. She told us how the whole workforce had been collecting money for the Kara Tepe refugee camp nearby. She herself gives 30 Euro to refugee families each month. Her income is 480 Euro.

In the small village of Kalloni we came across the remarkable private AGAIA initiative. For ten years the village

has been providing for refugees passing through, roughly 50 a month as Jorgos and Katerina, the main AGAIA activists told us. Since May that figure has risen to 400 a month though. AGAIA provides two rooms in the shade where people can have a rest and collect new provisions. Every morning volunteers begin to cook and collect donations of clothing, preparing themselves as much as possible for arriving refugees. During the last few weeks more than 5500 people received makeshift treatment there.

Conditions for refugees are not good on Lesbos. And they are not getting any better – not in Athens, and not at all in Hungary where refugees are now threatened with four years in jail. And not in Germany either where support capacity is consciously being kept low as a deterrence. These inhumane policies have to be built with the support of personalities from the arts, sport and the media to welcome refugees and to build a social Europe of solidarity – against austerity and locked doors.

The author is member of parliament for the "Left Party" in Germany, as well spokeswoman for international development of the "Left Party" parliamentary group.

The society for a culture of peace in Tuebingen still collects donations for supporting refugees on Lesbos. For more info see www.kulturdesfriedens.de or e-mail: info@kulturdesfriedens.de

Welcome2Europe are running a twitter blog providing up-to-date information from Lesbos: <https://twitter.com/LesvosW2eu>; <http://lesvos.w2eu.net/>

New repatriations and ambushes

The SYRIZA-government has committed itself to end the illegal, violent ambushes and push backs systematically carried out at sea by the former Greek authorities until not so long ago. Now there is increasing anecdotal evidence suggesting the renewed use of these methods. At the end of July the German "Watch the Med" organisation (<http://www.watchthemed.net>) reported about a number of incidents. Survivors of such violence tell of masked men "wearing Greek coastal guard uniforms" operating outside Greek waters. According to witnesses, masked men took away motors and petrol, put holes into the boats and left people, among them many women and children, to their fate. Turkish coast guards came to the rescue. Verbal statements: "Many [of them] with blue eyes and blond hair, people who do not speak Greek!" One ambush happened in open waters before Izmir and was recorded on video (see website watchthemed). Mid-August the Greek support network for refugees and migrants (Diktio koinonikis ypostirixis prosfygon kai Metanaston) condemned another incident of violent repatriation of three families in the area of Evros near the Turkish border. Some of them were Syrian Kurds with little children. On July 25th Amnesty International confirmed repatriations on the land route near the Turkish border. Minister Panoussis promised to immediately investigate the Greek police. We ask: Should not the EU-Frontex agency be asked as well? It is, after all, responsible for "the coordination of operative EU-border patrolling collaboration between member states."

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