

Germany is opposing changes to the EU's asylum policy

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The ministers of internal affairs from EU countries met on 7–8 October in Luxembourg to discuss asylum policy and the reaction to a refugee boat sinking near the coast of Lampedusa. At the meeting, Germany opposed the proposal put forward by Italy and Spain, among other countries, to distribute asylum seekers among individual EU member states, depending on the area, population and economic potential of a given country.

At the same time, the German minister of internal affairs, Hans-Peter *Friedrich*, suggested that the EU could improve the success of its asylum policy by better equipping the FRONTEX agency, by revising the effectiveness of the development policy addressed to North African countries and by signing new agreements with these countries concerning how smugglers should be punished. Germany also supports the construction of the European border surveillance system (Eurosur). Furthermore, Berlin is appealing to other states to accept more refugees and to improve the conditions in which they are kept (especially in Greece).

According to data from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, by September 2013 the number of asylum applications in Germany increased by 84% as compared to 2012. At the same time, the rate of positive decisions granting asylum has fallen by 6%, and currently stands at 27.4%. The largest groups of asylum seekers between January and September 2013 were citizens of the Russian Federation (13,500 people), Syrians (7,800 people) and Serbs (6,400 people).

Commentary

- Germany's resistance to the proposal put forward by Spain and Italy is due to the fact that it sees most asylum seekers as a threat to its welfare system, partly because of the burden imposed on local governments, who have the obligation to ensure subsistence to refugees (in 2008, the Federal Constitutional Court awarded that the monthly benefit for asylum seekers should be lifted from 225 to 336 euros). German proposals presented by Mr Friedrich concern mainly technical solutions aimed at improving border security and withholding the influx of more refugees to Germany. Germany is ranked tenth in Europe in terms of the number of asylum applications submitted per 1,000 residents.
- Germany is emphasising that it has accepted over 7,800 Syrian refugees in 2013, which in its opinion is a sufficient action as part of the European asylum policy (it has declared it will accept 5,000 more). At the same time, Germany is insisting on an international

conference concerning refugees from Syria being held, and that there be an increase in aid for countries neighbouring on Syria and offering shelter to refugees. It is, furthermore, of the opinion that EU member states should accept more refugees from Syria.

- The German asylum system is ineffective, and the problem is escalating as the number of refugees reaching Germany increases. This ineffectiveness is due to the length of the decision-making process in asylum cases, the lengthy appeals procedure, and difficulties with sending back people who have been refused asylum. Another problem for Germany is the duration of the tolerated stay for refugees, which often lasts a few years (there are approximately 90,000 people in this situation). The ruling Christian Democrats oppose even the possibility of shortening the procedure of granting asylum for people with high professional qualifications, who could partly fill plug the gap on the German labour market. In principal, refugees have no right to work in Germany.