Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 20.05.2015 www.osw.waw.pl

Germany supports the quota scheme for refugees in the EU

Niemcy popierają kwoty uchodźców w UE, Kamil Frymark

On 13 May the European Commission presented a draft scheme on the policy towards refugees coming to the EU. Under this strategy refugees would be taken in by all Schengen countries and the number of those accepted by a particular country would depend on its GDP, its population, the unemployment rate and the number of refugees taken in between 2010 and 2014. Under this scheme the EU would increase its involvement in fighting people smuggling gangs and in the direct evacuation of people from conflict zones. This would be aimed at preventing immigrants from attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea by themselves. Despite the fact that many EU countries (including France) have opposed this plan and the fact that the media report that the masses of refugees coming to Europe include Islamic State militants, Germany has backed the EC's plan.

Commentary

- Germany's favourable stance on the quota scheme is a new element in the country's asylum policy. Germany has previously been opposed to it, defending the position that refugees should be the responsibility of the countries they first arrive in. The latest forecasts of the Federal Office for Migrants and Refugees (BAMF) might have had an impact on the shift in Germany's stance on refugees. According to its data, 400,000 refugees will come to Germany in 2015. In 2014 202,834 applications for asylum were submitted in Germany. Only a small portion of the applications is successful; in 2014 it was 1.8% of all applications, i.e. 2,285 immigrants were granted asylum. If a quota system was introduced, it would reduce the number of applicants for asylum in Germany. Besides changes in the German asylum system this would lead to an improvement in the situation in Germany, where since 2008 (28,018 asylum applications) the number of applications has been constantly increasing.
- Despite earlier declarations calling for action against people smugglers (including declarations made by Chancellor Merkel) Germany does not want to become involved in a direct fight against gangs smuggling people from Africa to Europe, in part due to the fear that it could possibly become entangled in the conflict in Libya. Germany is ready to support (financially and materially) the Triton mission which is being implemented by FRONTEX, but it is opposed to extending (both in terms of geography and its substance) the mandate of the mission. In Germany's opinion, the Triton mission should, above all, ensure the security of the EU's external borders and should not be turned into a humanitarian mission. Another proposal which has been raised in the German debate is

increasing legal migration from Africa to Europe, including to Germany, and establishing EU centres in Africa which would receive asylum applications.

- Berlin is aware that the EU plan alone will not eliminate the financial problem that refugees pose for local governments. The German Federal Ministry of the Interior is therefore seeking to remove the burden from the federal states and communes which are responsible for taking care of asylum seekers. The BAMF is set to employ an additional 2,000 members of staff, which will make it possible to process asylum applications more rapidly and reduce the time during which a part of refugees are financially supported by local governments. It has also been suggested that a “fast-track” processing of applications should be established for people who are highly likely candidates to be granted asylum and another track for processing applications submitted by the remaining applicants. At present the average time of processing an application has been seven months.