

A migration pact in the spirit of the German government?



One core idea of Interior Minister Horst Seehofer's (CSU) proposals is the detention of refugees and asylum seekers at Europe's external border, while their claims await processing. [EPA-EFE | Stratis Balaskas]

For the first time since 2015, the number of asylum applications filed in the EU rose last year compared to the previous year. The German EU Council Presidency is pressing for reforms to the system, but the Commission's proposals are still some way off. EURACTIV Germany reports.

Several attempts to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) have failed in recent years. Expectations are now high for Germany, which has taken up the cause of reforming the CEAS "on the basis of the proposals of the EU Commission."

Anis Cassar, the spokesperson for the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), expressed confidence recently, saying "Germany has the political weight to get reform underway."

Seehofer's proposals

Meanwhile, Berlin presented its own ideas in its presidency programme, which proposes that future asylum applications be examined as quickly as possible at the EU's external borders "to differentiate between those applications which are obviously unsuccessful." In the event of rejection, entry should be refused and migrants should be given rapid feedback.

In early February, a policy paper caused a sensation by stating the government does not rule out "measures restricting freedom" in the course of the examination procedure. An Interior Ministry spokesperson confirmed to EURACTIV Germany that it is still adhering to this paper.

The ongoing critical discussion about these measures is one of the reasons why the Commission took so long to draw up its own proposals, according to European Parliament circles.

"Those who propose such a procedure do not want a dignified right of asylum at all, but only to ensure that as few refugees as possible come to the EU," Green MEP Erik Marquardt, a migration policy spokesperson for the group, told EURACTIV Germany.

However, Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nehammer (ÖVP) also spoke in favour of "speedy, constitutional procedures" at the external borders in a recent meeting with his German counterpart, Horst Seehofer (CSU).

"Flexible solidarity"

In addition to preliminary examinations, introducing a mandatory distribution mechanism and developing new return strategies form the two main pillars of Berlin's proposals.

The distribution issue, in particular, has repeatedly caused divisions between the EU countries, with the Visegrad states rejecting the obligatory admission of refugees.

Although Germany's programme contains no details on changes to the distribution mechanism, Seehofer hinted in an interview in early June that a country that did not participate could "support the system in another way," and added that he wants to "massively" expand the European border protection agency Frontex.

MEP Cornelia Ernst (Left) suspects that the Commission's proposals could also amount to this "flexible solidarity," as Seehofer called it, in that "those countries which are poorer take in fewer people but make funds available to Frontex."

Human rights organisations are outraged by such ideas. "What we see here is a mixture of an isolation and disenfranchisement strategy. The isolation aims to expand Frontex and the disenfranchisement to deprive asylum seekers of their rights to an asylum procedure," Günther Burkhardt, managing director of Pro Asyl, told EURACTIV Germany.

Such coupling could lead to "Germany and other states committed to the idea of the rule of law outsourcing the dirty work outside Europe's borders and having it carried out by states such as Hungary."

Seehofer's proposals have faced opposition even among Christian Democrats. "It must be clear that

German proposals as a 'migration pact'?

Within the framework of its Council Presidency, Berlin can push the Commission's legislative initiatives forward and expedite Council deliberations.

There is much to suggest that the Commission's proposals will not differ too much from Germany's. It also looks as if there is fundamental agreement on the design of the distribution mechanism. So the devil is probably in the details.

However, if Seehofer has his way, the question of the distribution mechanism should be put on the back burner for the time being. Last Wednesday (24 June), he said the introduction of preliminary examinations and management in the event of rejection is of particular importance.

[Edited by Sarah Lawton/Zoran Radosavljevic]

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