

Jumping on the bandwagon of terror

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They're out in force again, jumping on the bandwagon of terror: all those who've been sitting on their reactionary ideas on identity and on sealing off the borders and who have long had their draft laws on national security ready and waiting. After the attacks in Paris, they feel the time has now come to push their agendas.

Even before the attacks it was almost impossible to have a rational discussion on migration. And yet we have to. Migration was, is and will be a fact of life. According to the UNHCR, an estimated 60 million people were displaced in 2014 alone. But contrary to the impression often given, nine out of ten refugees stay in their own region, i.e. in the countries of the so-called Third World. Only a tenth manage a longer journey. The question is, how will Germany, and Europe, respond?

There have been plenty of misguided approaches over the last years: closing borders, setting up the highest fences possible with the most barbarous barbed wire available at the EU's external borders, but none of that worked. The EU border regime brings only harm – especially for the refugees. But this is of no interest to the racist, populist politicians espousing tighter controls and the further fortressing of Europe; at any rate they are concerned only with the semblance of politics.

And so renewed efforts are made to “externalize” the problem, as the politicians put it. But this time the burden is to be shifted from the southern European countries to African states. Two days after the attacks in Paris, EU delegates attended an African-European refugee summit in La Valetta (Malta), meeting with heads of state including many representatives from autocratic states. They spoke with people who bear a significant amount of the responsibility for the fact that people are fleeing northwards from Africa, e.g. from Sudan, Eritrea and Egypt. Delegates held negotiations on how to make it easier for Europe to keep refugees out and on setting up refugee holding camps on the African continent. As though recent history did not make it clear enough how inhuman and thus how instable these unjust systems are. Europe will ultimately bear the consequences of this political failure.

Wouldn't it make more sense to strengthen civil society in the Middle East and in North Africa, instead of selling weapons and surveillance technology, fanning the flames of the conflicts and contributing to the oppression of democratic opposition movements? Again and again we hear that we must tackle the problems that are triggering the mass movement of refugees. But do we ever hear a politician say that ensuring decent living conditions around the world requires fair economic and trade policies?

And then there are the many refugees who are already in Europe – no amount of closed borders or tighter security laws can be used to “get rid” of them. For these people who have come here seeking protection, all human rights standards must apply. Contrary to the view of some legal nihilists, the right to asylum is not and cannot be made dependent on what is “feasible”. Meeting applicable standards primarily means preventing human rights violations by state actors, i.e. preventing any further violence against refugees and migrants, as in Spain, Hungary, Croatia or Bulgaria. Countries in Europe must accommodate the refugees humanely and ensure adequate protection against attacks by Neo-Nazis and similar threats.