

European "Freedom Rides"

Secure Corridors for Refugees and Action against the Authoritarian Turn in Europe

1.

The geographically shortest and cheapest travel route for refugees from the Middle East into Europe leads from the Bosphorus bridges through Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, Hungary and Austria. A prolonged route leads through Croatia, another through Slovenia and even Italia to the Brenner route northward. Those prolongations are due to the closure of Hungarian borders. An East Balkan North route through Romania has not been established to date due to difficult terrain, but there is also talk about a Russian North route to Norway.

The alternative to the land route is crossing the Aegean sea, which is expensive, risky and often fatal. From there an overland route through Macedonia is linking back to the Balkan route, or another crossing of the Adriatic to Italy, which again is expensive, risky and often fatal. These evasion movement is forced upon the refugees politically, too.

2.

In the states along the Balkan routes, an authoritarian change has far progressed and has taken forms that have been, in the case of Orbans Hungary, called "mafia state". These regimes are oriented in part towards Putins Russia, but they owe their standing also to the support from western Europe. Inwardly, they rest upon their ability to organize a racist consensus. Antagonist forces from the inside are notoriously weak, in the case of Bulgaria particularly so. That is not only due to the general weakness of libertarian forces in post-socialist states, but also to a streak of defeats and to the permanent disruptive efforts of instrumentalisation by western and Russian foreign policy.

It is precisely currents like the Bulgarian libertarian left deserve attention and support, the more so because the causes of their defeats lie so close to the nearest causes of the present advances of counterrevolution in Europe.

The present system of border protection in Europe has a vested interest in the state of affairs in Bulgaria. In societies like these it is, for lack of organized oppositon, easier to impose a system of police brutality and manhunt. This will serve as an effective deterrent for refugees, to force them to more difficult and geographically risky routes. The migration canal Bulgaria is blocking is ages old, the ancestors of most European agricultural populations came through there after the Ice Ages.

That fraction of the apparatus which we can design with names like Cameron and Seehofer are the foremost in supporting these regimes, in coordination with Putins Russia. The considerable support for Bulgarias border police brings about a convergence of European and Russian interest, and express a change in fortune towards the likes of Orban an Kaczynski. The agreement between the EU and Erdogans Turkey, on the other hand, ties the EU to Turkish interest.

Those are violently adverse to those of Russia on the Syrian war theater, and in a way that obviously that is not about to enter the settlement of interests between Iran and the USA. The EU has been, by this agreement, been drawn much closer into the Syrian war than it intended. It can be supposed that Merkels policy was directed at avoiding that even at high costs.

3.

It remains to be seen whether this agreement will survive the current escalation of the Syrian war, and even more the escalation of things under Erdogan. Turkey itself is facing an interior war who has quickly been turning to the worse. It seems only a matter of time until not only from Syria but also from Turkey a mass flight sets in. The border protection arrangement Erdogan signed with the EU will stand to crumble then.

The next wave of refugee migration will have to face an Europe where conditions have become tougher. The proponents of sealing of the borders have gained momentum. In Germany, too, the forces that consider immigration to be a societal task rather than a threat have been forced into retreat. Fatigue and the constant onslaught from the Right have taken their toll. Austria has laid down an uper limit to the admission of immigrants, and in an immediate reaction we have seen the Balkan states closing their borders for transit. It does look much worse than in August 2015.

In the same pace that the war is drawing closer, the mechanisms of border policing are threatening the possibility of refuge in the EU. These mechanisms have been set up anew after their virtual breakdown in August that had been brought about by a massive movement fo flight that in some instances seems to have

taken a lesson from the refugee protest movement in 2012 and 2013 in Germany. The foot march over the Hungarian autobahn to Austria shows that it is possible to give expression to the political character of such a flight movement. The refugees can have a voice of their own, if they organise, and they can have a shared consciousness and common demands and work for their assertion.

From here, a scenario like that is not any more unfeasible: the refugees could join together, and gather, as they already did to protect themselves from police brutality in the Bulgarian woods; but not only in groups of 50 people, which proved to be little and too weak for effective protection, but in greater formations with mass character to ensure safety in numbers.

a) To make that possible a number of things need to be achieved and provided. The public, and by that I mean: the western public must not be allowed to ignore those things any longer. Organisations with western passports, reporters and cameracrews must be organized, along with western journalists who are ready to report on these kind of things, and all that with that degree of commitment that is necessary when people's lives are at stake.

b) There needs to be a certain infrastructure. Assemblies on that order of magnitude need logistics, supply. There must be some cooperation with the Red Cross. Also we need to involve western activists who are already active in the Balkans in humanitarian aid for refugees. There needs to be fundraising. Stations need to be set up along the route, preferably right up from Istanbul. There will be need to spread news of trouble ahead along the route in real time like when these days Macedonia closed its borders for 48 hours. Existing contacts need to be deepened.

c) Physical protection must be provided. The antifascist movement of all countries involved would do well to embrace that challenge while recognising the risks involved. It has its own interest in that. It would be only timely to remember the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the campaign the white and northern left led to support the movements: the participants of the "Freedom Rides" took a great risk, but always one that was little compared to what the southern black activists were facing. Those Freedom Rides could serve as a close example of what we have in mind now.

d) Legal assistance in these states is necessary, in every form, starting from expertise on penal law and law of aliens to administrative law, especially law of assembly, not only on a national scale: there is also European Law and European Human Rights Charter involved. Experts on all these things are needed, as the experience from the refugee movement of 2012 shows.

4.

To us, it is not the matter if the goals set out here are too ambitious or could be called voluntarist. No measures, however large the scale, would prove equal to the task, given the dimensions we are facing. But there is a big difference whether we are in a position to draw the conflict into a sphere where the new authoritarian tendencies could really be dealt a defeat. That could prove decisive for the imminent new stages of the crises both of the European institutions and of the German industry which is close ahead. The example of self activity and self organisation maybe will not be lost on the industrial workers, and the lesson that the state will not be enough to shield small Europe from a war the rest of the world is embroiled in could strengthen the non-fascist parts of the middle classes. The most important lesson from the 2012 movement, after all, is that things will get worse not because of the struggle but because of the lack of struggle, or defeat.