Tomorrow's Affairs

By: TA | AP Insight

The European Union continues to tighten its migration system

European Union officials on Monday were finalizing a major overhaul of its migration system, including streamlined deportations and increased detentions, after years of fierce debate on the issue has seen the rise of far-right political parties.

Since a surge in asylum-seekers and other migrants to Europe a decade ago, public views on the issue have shifted.

EU migration policies have hardened, and the number of asylum-seekers is down from record levels.

Still, U.S. President Donald Trump in recent days issued sharp criticism of the 27-nation bloc's migration policies as part of a national security strategy painting European allies as weak.

Ministers meeting in Brussels agreed to a "safe third country" concept and a list of safe countries of origin, Danish minister Rasmus Stoklund said.

That means EU nations can deny residency and deport migrants because they either hail from a safe country or could apply for asylum in one outside the EU.

"We will be able to reject people that have no reason for asylum in Europe, and then it will be possible for us to make mechanisms and procedures that enable us to return them faster," Stoklund said. "It should not be human smugglers that control the access to Europe."

Solidarity pool

Ministers also agreed to the formation of a "solidarity pool" to share costs of hosting refugees among member nations.

The pool is meant to collect 430 million euros ($489 million) to disburse to countries facing greater migratory pressure including Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain in southern Europe. Hungary and Poland have long opposed any obligation for countries to host migrants or pay for their upkeep.

"It is important to give the people also the feeling back that we have control over what is happening," said Magnus Brunner, the EU's commissioner for migration.

The European Council will now negotiate with the 720 lawmakers at the European Parliament to accept or modify the migration policy changes.

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Amnesty International EU advocate on migration Olivia Sundberg Diez likened the EU's migration changes to the Trump administration's crackdown.

She called on European lawmakers to block the new measures that "will inflict deep harm on migrants and the communities that welcome them."

French Green lawmaker Mélissa Camara called the changes "a renunciation of our fundamental values and human rights."

Return hubs

In May, EU nations endorsed sweeping reforms to the bloc's asylum system, with the European Commission issuing the new Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The pact, among other things, called for increasing deportations and setting up "return hubs," a euphemism for deportation centers for rejected asylum-seekers.

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The EU wouldn't set up or manage such "return hubs," which could be in Europe or elsewhere, but would create the legal framework to allow states to negotiate with non-EU countries willing to take rejected asylum-seekers.

Nations like Austria and Denmark likely will seek partners to host such costly and legally murky centers, said Camille Le Coz, director of the Migration Policy Institute Europe think tank, pointing to the deal the Netherlands struck in September with Uganda to host refugees.

Such centers differ from the existing but so far ineffective deal signed by Italy with Albania to offshore the asylum processing of migrants rescued at sea.

At the time, the contentious plan was applauded by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as an "out-of-the-box" solution to manage irregular migration, but courts in Italy have repeatedly blocked it.

Mainstream political parties hope the pact on migration resolves the issues that have divided EU nations since well over 1 million migrants swept into Europe in 2015, most of them fleeing war in Syria and Iraq.