

**Today, as in the past, many exiles are seeing their hopes dashed in closed camps in European countries, which on the one hand claim to be models of human rights, while on the other, demand that migrants remain outside the European Union (EU). Using the pretext of “massive” arrivals, the EU and neighbouring states have constantly reinforced their detention systems: from 2011 to 2016, the total known capacity of camps identified by the Network, has gone from 32,000 to 47,000 places.**

While in some countries the number of camps has been reduced, this is not due to a more favourable policy for migrants. It is above all due to temporary closures following revolts, or to policies which encourage large centres. Alongside these detention facilities, is a more widespread type of para-internment, sometimes referred to as an “alternative to detention”. It is particularly in African and Balkan countries that the EU has outsourced its “migrant management” to that camps are proliferating.

These changes are an indication of a streamlining process which is also being deployed in the selection systems put in place in 2015 as part of the “hot-spots approach” (see note 1 of the map).

The fragmentation of control has led to diminished responsibility that could be invoked in the numerous cases of fundamental rights violations committed in the name of border control. Increasingly, people working for agencies and administrations with ill-defined roles operate in these places.

Although the media regularly talks of the plight of migrants in the Mediterranean, violence also occurs during the “reception” or selection conducted at EU border posts: after the traumatic experience of the crossing, the boat people can find themselves behind bars for weeks or even months.

Hundreds of thousands of people, some of whom have been in the EU for a long time, are shut away, often with no information about their rights, for periods which can stretch to 18 months, as in Bulgaria, Greece, Malta, in Ceuta or Melilla.

The dominant thinking is to refuse to admit, and to send back people deemed to be undesirable. However, many of them cannot be sent back and detention is used, above all, as a punitive measure, to dissuade those wanting to leave their country.

Due to the non-respect of the rights of migrants and the inhumane conditions in the centres, a silent anger is brewing. Hunger strikes, mutilations and suicide attempts...are just some of the forms of protest, which can turn into revolts. With no access to justice, deprived of any contact with the outside world, facing arbitrary decisions and the silence of the authorities, such actions are the only means of expression available to interned people. They express their suffering, but above all, their refusal to be deprived of freedom simply because they are not “on the right side” of the border.

## **Police stations: outposts of the deportation machine**

EU regulations stipulate that “detention should normally be conducted in specialised holding centres”. Moreover, when prisons are used to hold foreign nationals, they should be separated from “ordinary prisoners”. Regulations make no mention of police stations, barracks or customs offices, and yet such places are regularly used to penalize so-called irregular entry.

Migrants intercepted by police at the border can be held at police stations for several hours or even several days. This is the case in Bulgaria, Cyprus, in Finland, Latvia, Slovakia or in Greece, where such places have been widely used since 2000. Police stations and gendarmerie barracks can also be used as referral centres, depriving foreigners of their freedom before they are transferred to “special holding centres”. This is the case in France.

Foreigners arrested during identity checks can also be taken to the police station before deportation. In Spain, in 2013, 6,500 people (60% of the total number) were deported from a police station. The periods of internment are generally relatively short (72 hours in Spain), but detention can last several months in Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Algeria or in Morocco.

Such forms of administrative confinement may be combined with alarming police practices (handcuffing, body searches, confinement with ordinary prisoners...) which criminalize and put these foreigners in a precarious situation; internment in such places is generally not subject to judicial control and often has no legal basis; interned people cannot always have access to migrant associations, or to doctors or lawyers.

According to the European Court of Human Rights, authorities which detain irregular immigrants in police stations without reason, are guilty of “fraudulent activities”. Yet, such practices are still common.

Lastly, although two decisions handed down by the Court of Justice of the European Union (2011) prohibit the use of police and gendarmerie stations for criminal proceedings simply for the offence of illegal residence, member states are still authorized to retain foreign nationals to check the legality of their stay, or to place them in an administrative detention centre. The use of these facilities therefore continues.

The recurrent use of police stations at different stages in the deportation procedures is part of a continuum, along with prisons, holding centres and border inspection points. These places are not easily open to scrutiny and disregard all regulations concerning persons in detention. They are helping to create an archipelago of camps, making them difficult to identify and map.

# 2016 SCENES MAP OF DESOLATION OF AT THE EU BORDERS CAMPS

*migreurop*

Migreurop is a network of activists and researchers from Europe, Africa and the Middle East. It aims to raise awareness and to denounce policies which marginalize migrants (internment, deportations, border closures and externalization of immigration controls).

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