



KurZfASsung von John Emeka Akude

When will this absurdity finally stop? On the recent EU-Africa summit on refugees

At the conclusion of their summit with African rulers in Malta on the resolution of the refugee influx to Europe on the 12th of November last year, the European Union announced its resolve to aid African leaders with about 1.9 billion euros in order to keep their citizens away from migrating to Europe. I must say that as an African, I feel really insulted, not just for the paltry sum mentioned for such a gigantic assignment, but more importantly, since on the one hand African leaders responded as errand boys and unquestionably accepted the offer and since on the other hand this is inconsistent with lessons and evidence from development studies. Additionally, I am equally disturbed, because it will generate consequences that run counter to EU professed values of democracy and respect for human rights.

Apparently, the EU has bought into the shallow theory known as the *big push* (credited to Paul Rosenstein-Rodan and represented in development studies by no less than Prof. Jeffrey Sachs) which postulates that all you need to conquer poverty is to increase development aid. Well, several studies and careful observations have shown that this is incorrect. It takes more than capital investment to achieve development. The social contexts of development states matter, and even more, because increased development aid could increase corruption and graft that African rulers are

notorious of and thus further underdevelopment. William Easterly found out in a study of the effects of aid increment on development in Africa that development indices decreased with increments in development aid¹. In *Governance and Crisis of the State in Africa*², I identified a couple of mechanisms through which development aid has contributed to stultifying development in Africa.

The fallacy of African poverty

I think it is time to correct the erroneous impression that the world is helping Africa with aid. The opposite is rather the truth. A recent publication from a group of British and African researchers calculates that Africa receives about 30 billion US-\$ per annum in aid and loses 192 billion US-\$ within the same period to the rest of the world through tax dodging by multinational firms, repatriation of their profits, costs of climate change and exit of skilled workers. And this is additional to the fact that about 85 % of financial aid to African countries come back to Western banks as private fortunes of African politicians and top civil servants while the costs of servicing those credits accumulate. By the way, the off-shore system used to launder these monies is also the system used by terrorists to finance their activities.

If the EU really wants to make Africans stay in Africa by improving the living conditions there, it might be advisable to start by abolishing these illegal financial movements. Furthermore, it would be more helpful to African economies if the EU abolished the agricultural subsidies to European farmers which help push down prices in international markets and make African producers uncompetitive in the same. The EU should equally stop European fishing firms from dominating fishery activities in African waters and pushing small African fishermen out of business; a phenomenon that has made many African fishermen jobless and thus migrants on the way to Europe or pirates in African waters. This also

¹Easterly, W. (2002). The cartel of good intentions. *Foreign Policy*, (131), 40-49.

²Akude, J. E. (2009). *Governance and Crisis of the State in Africa: The Context and Dynamics of the Conflicts in West Africa*. London: Adonis & Abbey.

applies to the production of bio fuels which make the prices of food items prohibitive for the average African. If the EU is sincere in its wish to make Africans stay at home, these measures will definitely be more effective than any handouts doled out to African non-democratic rulers. Because the falsehood of African poverty has been peddled around for too long and has partly become a justification for Africa's global marginalization, it has become necessary to put the records straight by stressing that Africa is not poor; it is rather rich. But Africans are poor because Africa is governed into poverty! It is rather astounding that, despite what it has lost and continues to lose to the rest of the developed world in the past five hundred years, Africa continues to thrive more or less.

The rationale for the summit

Well, the leaders of the European Union know all of what I am saying even better and, despite this knowledge, they still decided to fight migration to Europe by doling out finances to African rulers. Why? I think the EU just orchestrated a show to appease the right wing of the European public that has been critical of the influx of refugees to Europe. And to that extent, it is a demonstration of helplessness in facing the challenges posed by the influx. What sense does it make to expect serious and honest cooperation from African rulers whose practices through omission and commission drive Africans out of Africa? Migration out of Africa is advantageous to the African rulers because it is the young and educated people, that could have become restive in view of the effects of bad and kleptocratic governance, who decide to leave; thus, dissipating the ever growing revolutionary pressures in a host of African states that now and again express themselves in forms of military coups and internal wars.

If the EU is serious about improving the quality of life in Africa in order to induce Africans to stay in Africa, it should consider other measures that deny African rulers access to their loot in Western banks while seriously, consistently and honestly promoting education, democracy and respect for human rights as the cornerstone of its development policy. But if the EU

meets with African rulers to confer on how to fight migration from Africa to Europe, it might as well consider conferring with African pirates on how to fight piracy in Africa.

Without going into too much detail, I think the EU should see this development as a further proof to the fact that the post-World War II order (of maintaining dictatorial and repressive regimes in the ex-colonies as long as they do the bidding of the West) has probably reached its limits, and use this opportunity to adjust. If not, it risks failure now and in its future endeavours in Africa.

Most expectedly, the promised financial support will most likely lead to the outcome that the EU has sworn to European citizens to fight and prevent; namely corruption, abuse of human rights, conflicts etc. This is because the money will be used to finance mainly North African rulers to make sure that black Africans do not cross their territories on their way to Europe. And the judicial and administrative practices of those states do not really conform to European principles and standard. As I write, black African refugees on their way to Europe are being detained, tortured and killed in North African streets and prisons, especially in Morocco, where state agents are the main actors in these practices. With EU financial support, this tendency will increase. Why this assumption?

EU policy change: From humanitarian to militarized fortress

Well, this assumption is inevitable if one traces the unfoldment of EU-policy on this issue since early last year (2015). It has to be recollected that European concern for refugees started with the pictures of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean in the spring of last year. This jolted the conscience of many Europeans who then demanded that their governments and the EU do something against it. At this point, the major concern of the Union could be said to be mainly humanitarian. However, as the influx of refugees dramatically increased, rightist elements in several European states started exploiting the opportunity to instigate fears (of the unknown) amongst European citizens. Mainly because

European mainstream politicians have ignored the worries of sections of the citizenry over the migration and integration policies of many European states for a very long time, the European right started swelling. Terrified by this development, fortifying European borders against refugees has been constantly considered a serious policy option by the European Union leaders throughout 2015. The idea was then officially articulated at an EU meeting in March by the Foreign Ministers of Austria, Italy and Germany. It has as well been suggested by the British Minister of the Interior, Theresa May. In April this year, the Austrian Minister of the Interior, Johana Mikl-Leitner, and the Chancellor, Werner Faymann, specifically suggested the use of North African states as bulwarks against refugees on their way to Europe. At another EU meeting on the issue in Brussels in September, Italy again (this time joined by Greece) pushed the idea further. This plan was reiterated again in early December 2015 by the German Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maizière, who has since been campaigning for the idea. However, this time around, he apparently saw the need for political correctness in the whole affair and decided to term it *welcome centre*.

The major plan of the idea was to immediately organise asylum camps in regions bordering the EU in order to temporarily accommodate the refugees until a decision has been reached on the eligibility of their asylum applications. This process has to be fast and refugees who refuse to voluntarily return to their countries of origin should be immediately arrested and detained. According to the EU, the erection of safe and sustainable camps should initially serve as a medium-term strategy with the purpose of increasing the capacity of the affected region to admit and accommodate refugees. In the long term, the protagonists argue, this strategy offers the prospects of adequate processing of the papers of refugees and their families until they return to their homelands.

The EU has initially tried to justify this policy with humanitarian arguments of saving women and young girls from forced prostitution in Europe, stopping the drowning of refugees in the Mediterranean as well as undercutting the human traffickers who earn a fortune from the ordeal of

migrants. However, in the course of last year (2015) and in view of increasing influx of refugees, the EU policy as well as language has changed from a humanitarian (to rescue drowning refugees) to a militarized one (barricading European borders against refugees). In the process, sight is lost of the EU avowal to protect human rights and respect democratic principles. To underline the new policy rationale, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, said at an EU summit in Brussels in October 2015 that the exceptionally easy access to Europe is one of the main points of attraction for refugees and that Europe has to get ready to counter this threat which is bound to continue next spring. With the declaration of refugees as a threat, it became clear that it is something against which one has to guard Europe.

The effects of North Africa as EU-bulwark on human rights of black Africans

To understand how this EU-African leaders' agreement will play out in North Africa, it is instructive to look at the implementation of the new EU policy and its consequences in the European Union's border states. This methodological approach is justified by the fact that this pact with African leaders is a mere southward extension of the same policy of fortifying Europe against refugees which has since taken off in the European Union's border states.

Since the EU has decided on this new strategy of sealing off Europe to all refugees at all costs, the approach to refugees amongst European officials has changed for the worse. And the EU is ready to turn a blind eye to dictatorial tendencies and abuse of human rights as long as refugees are kept off Europe. In October 2015, following the increasing admonitions of the EU to Bulgarian and Greek governments to control their borders more effectively, the Bulgarian border patrol shot and killed an Afghan refugee and on the Greek island Lesbos, seven refugees died (amongst them four children and a baby) as Greek coast guards rammed their ship against a boat full of refugees. Even Turkey, a state whose relationship to the Union

could at best be described as critical as a result of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's hardline approach to political opposition (Gezi-Park-Protests 2013 for example) and abuse of human rights (arrest and detention of journalists), is suddenly in the good books of the European Union and thus a cooperation partner: The EU plans to erect about six refugee camps in Turkey and German Chancellor Angela Merkel is ready to donate the 3 billion euros requested by Turkey for this purpose. Because the EU is desperately in need of Turkey's help, Turkey is exploiting the opportunity to improve its chances of joining the Union and EU leaders are budging. Even the President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz in a comment on Erdogan's use of military force against the pro-Kurdish opposition party Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi; HDP) last year, said that Turkey really behaved correctly and that one should not condemn the country. However, this EU's desperation with curbing the influx of refugees to Europe is blindfolding its leaders to the obvious fact that Erdogan's obsession with fighting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê; PKK) will definitely thwart the goals of the EU and rather sharpen the situation that the EU is paying him to hinder: the production of more refugees heading to Europe as a result of Turkey's heavy bombing of alleged PKK positions.

In order to facilitate the achievement of the new policy goals, the EU recently strengthened Frontex – an agency set up to secure European borders in 2004 – and additionally mandated it to sharpen its control of European borders. The EU heads of government decided in October 2015 to beef up Frontex with an additional 775 staff and to increase its mandate: Frontex has the right to deport refugees whose applications have been refused forthwith. With this proviso, the refugees are denied the rights of challenging their deportations in a court of law as is stipulated in the laws of several Western European states. Moreover, Frontex has replaced the Italian humanitarian programme of Mare Nostra, which was very helpful in saving drowning refugees at the beginning of this year, with its own programme Triton which is primarily focused on sealing off Europe from refugees. Furthermore, the members of the so

called Visegrád Group, comprising Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, have all established a border protection police. All these have led to criticisms from certain sections of the European civil society. For example, the director of Pro Asyl, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that takes care of affairs of refugees in Germany, Günter Burkhardt, described this fortification of Europe against refugees as an "apocalyptic vision"³. In furtherance of its policy of fortifying Europe, the EU has launched the Operation Sophia whereby European warships are allowed to stop, search, repel and destroy refugee boats on the Libyan coast.

Thus, the EU can discard her own values in the pursuit of the policy of *Fortress Europe*; and its summit with African rulers on controlling refugee to Europe is only an extension of this policy with its attendant consequences. That this policy will worsen the human rights situation of migrants in North African states is not just an assumption: It is already happening! For the most part of 2015, EU leaders have been in constant contact with Moroccan officials on this issue. In May of that year, the ARD correspondent in Rabat, Alexander Göbel, reported that the EU is encouraging the Moroccan government to use all means possible to stop African migrants from coming to Europe. As a result, Moroccan security officials regularly beat up and injure African migrants, burn down their camping tents at night (thus risking murder of these refugees), rob them of their money and other valuables and shoot at them. There are reports whereby such maltreatments have led to deaths, though this was perpetrated by non-state officials who ostensibly were encouraged by the actions of state agents.

Generally, there is a growing sentiment against black African migrants stranded in North African cities on their way to Europe. The EU is ready to condone these inhuman acts as long as they help keep African refugees out of Europe. This has led an official of ABCDS – an NGO that is

³Süddeutsche Zeitung. (2014, 5. Dez.). EU-Flüchtlingszentren in Afrika. „Apokalyptische Vision“. <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/eu-fluechtlingszentren-in-afrika-apokalyptische-vision-1.2254709>. Accessed: 7. Dez. 2015; translated by the author.

dedicated to helping these black African refugees in Morocco –, Mohammed Talbi, to describe Morocco as the „gendarme of the EU⁴“, just like Libya under Muammar Ghaddafi or Tunisia under Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. He concludes by saying that the EU pretends to have a policy on migration but is rather actually encouraging and supporting repressive and racial measures in North Africa in order to keep black African migrants out of Europe.

Conclusion

Neglect and mismanagement of the migration problematic by mainstream European politicians have effectuated a shift to the right amongst the European public. Recent elections in some European states buttress this fact. Under pressure of losing elections to rightist political parties as a result of the refugee influx, EU leaders decided to seal off Europe to refugees by erecting asylum centres in non-EU states bordering the Union. This policy is the core of the recent EU-Africa refugee summit which is merely an extension of that policy southwards. Because the agreement reached at the summit will neither improve the economic development of Africa nor curtail the influx of refugees to Europe (migration attempts will continue) but will definitely worsen the human rights situation of black African refugees stranded in North African states, it offers cause for concern. The EU should realise that by dancing to the tunes of European rightists, it is merely strengthening them. We may therefore not be surprised to see rightist (and extreme rightist) political parties winning elections in European states; a very dangerous development as we are already witnessing in Poland. It is not yet too late to correct this course.

⁴Göbel, A. (2013, 18. Mai). Flüchtlingslager in Marokko. „Sie verhaften und schlagen uns“. tagesschau.de. <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/marokko-fluechtlinge100.html>. Accessed: 29. Jan. 2016; translated by the author.