

EU Summit in Malta strikes dirty deal to keep refugees out of Europe

By Martin Kreickenbaum
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The EU heads of state and government meeting in Valletta, Malta, struck a deal Thursday with representatives from more than 30 African states to keep refugees out of Europe.

As part of the deal, the African governments are to crack down on their borders and accelerate measures to take back migrants deported from Europe. In exchange for acting as Europe's border guards, the governments are to receive funding from the EU countries.

The immense hypocrisy of the adopted Action Plan is evident from the fact that it is the imperialist military interventions in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and other countries, which have turned millions into refugees, have been waged in the name of human rights, the fight against terror and the toppling of dictatorships. Now the EU is lining up with some of the most brutal rulers in Africa to suppress and imprison refugees.

In some cases, the European authorities could not respond fast enough in the process of turning the villains of yesterday into its partners of today. The Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir had to send his foreign minister Ibrahim Ghandour to Valletta, because al-Bashir is wanted by the International Court in The Hague for genocide and serious war and human rights crimes.

As is usual in such cases, the Action Plan and the final declaration of the summit warned of the need to respect human rights and deal with refugees and migrants in accordance with international law. But this is purely rhetorical. In fact, the European Union shamelessly collaborates with the despots and dictators in Africa and massively supports their repressive measures against their own people.

While the EU claimed that the meeting was held on "equal footing," the summit decisions leave no doubt that the EU dictated the terms to the African nations. A

senior diplomat of the African Union told the online magazine *Afro Line*: "There is no dialogue. What we are seeing from the EU is a monologue that seeks only to impose its own agenda."

This monologue is aimed at outsourcing border controls and the repulsion of refugees to Africa and rendering invisible "the fugitives and why they flee", as Sabine Eckart of the aid organization Medico International put it. Flight and migration are denounced in the Action Plan as "irregular migration", which must be suppressed by the fight against "human smuggling and human trafficking".

In return, the EU promised to expand "legal" migration opportunities. German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that "our future lies in the legality of exchange, not in the financing of smugglers and traffickers." The numbers involved, however, amount to the proverbial drop in the bucket. The number of Erasmus grants for students and scientists from Africa is to be doubled. Currently these scholarships involve just a few dozen students and academics. Facilitation in obtaining visas was also promised, but the provisions were still to be negotiated in "workshops."

It is not the existence of people-smuggling networks which forces millions to flee from Africa to Europe. The causes lie rather in the neo-colonial policies carried out by the major powers in West and Central Africa and the Horn of Africa. People are fleeing in the tens of thousands from wars led by the European powers in Mali, Mauritania, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Niger and Chad. At the same time the plunder of Africa by European companies leads to the impoverishment of the whole continent.

In Valletta, the EU pledged to launch a trust fund of €1.8 billion to support projects that "curb and prevent irregular migration" and allow "the return and

acceptance of deported refugees”. These funds will flow primarily towards securing borders and the security forces in the countries of origin of refugees and transit countries. The funds also serve to ensure that the ruling elites of the countries receiving money cooperate closely with the EU. The distribution of money is to be overseen by the European Commission and representatives of European donor countries.

The Sudanese Foreign Minister Ghandour promised that his government would do its best to seal its borders. “Sudan is now trying to guard this border with Libya in cooperation with other neighbors as well. But as you know, with a long border and limited resources that may not be easy. But Sudan is doing its best.”

In addition to Sudan and the despotic governments in Eritrea, Egypt and Morocco are also to receive funds to stop refugees from entering Europe. The EU will support them in the funding of refugee camps in Africa and the training and equipping of security forces, who will do the dirty work of preventing refugees from travelling to Europe.

On the sidelines of the summit, the EU signed an agreement with the Ethiopian government with the vague title “Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility”. In fact the agreement is exclusively aimed at preventing migration and mobility. Ethiopia currently hosts 733,000 refugees and is considered an important source and transit country for refugees on the route leading from the Horn of Africa to Europe. With the agreement, the government in Addis Ababa has committed itself to intern refugees in primitive camps and repatriate deported refugees in exchange for a few crumbs from the EU.

A second focus of the EU agenda lies in the rapid and mass deportation of refugees and migrants who have made it to Europe. Ajay Bramdeo, the ambassador of the African Union to the EU in Brussels, warned that many deported immigrants could be pursued and interned in their countries of origin. “If there is no clarity we’re going to end up with open sky prisons, where the human rights of those interned are going to be violated.”

Nevertheless, the EU is making every effort to conclude readmission agreements. The existing agreements with Tunisia and Morocco give some insight into what refugees can expect.

In Tunisia, refugees deported from Europe can expect

to be persecuted by the security forces even if they received refugee status from the refugee agency of the United Nations (UNHCR). Apprehended refugees are interned in a special prison for migrants in the outskirts of Tunis— Whardia. The prison is run by the National Guard and not subject to state law.

Whardia is notorious for serious human rights violations and its ill treatment of refugees. It is described by aid organizations as “the black hole of Tunisia”, because the Tunisian government publishes no data or statistics on the prison. Neither the exact number of detainees is known, nor how many refugees are illegally moved to the Tunisian-Algerian border and left in the desert.

Morocco has signed a repatriation agreement with the Spanish government and carries out the EU’s dirty work at the border to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The Moroccan security authorities are preventing refugees from crossing the barriers around the enclaves, and have regularly declared that the refugee camps around Ceuta and Melilla are illegal. The camps have been burnt down, and the refugees hunted and severely mistreated.

Iverna McGowan, director of the EU department of Amnesty International, told the AFP news agency, “The EU is seeking to transfer its migration problem. This can lead to an outsourcing of human rights violations and is quite worrying.”

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