



Analysis

From the “carrot and stick” to the “stick”

From GAMM (2005) to “Partnership Frameworks” (2016) in Africa

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The EU has finally lost patience with a decade-long approach based on dialogue with countries in Africa calling for the return and readmission of refugees. Under plans adopted by the European Commission on 7 June 2016 the EU explicitly seeks to exploit Member States’ historical neo-colonial links to try to contain the movement of migrants and refugees. The Commission report says:

“The special relationships that Member States may have with third countries, reflecting political, historic and cultural ties fostered through decades of contacts, should also be exploited to the full for the benefit of the EU. At present, the opposite is often the case. Trust needs to be built up.”

This might be better phrased as asking EU Member States to use their histories of imperialism and exploitation to ask African states to sort out an EU problem.

The future foretold – from Trevi to GAMM

EU attempts to try to stop the arrival of refugee and migrants dates back to the pre-Maastricht times. The Trevi Group, the intergovernmental fora set up in 1976, made immigration one of its priorities - the Dublin Convention (first country of entry) was agreed on 15 June 1990, the same year as the Schengen agreement entered into force and the gradual construction of ‘Fortress Europe’ began.

In December 2005, an Informal Summit at Hampton Court palace saw the adoption of a “Global approach to migration: Priority actions focussing on Africa and the Mediterranean”. This ‘Global Approach to Migration and Mobility’ (GAMM) saw migration as a prominent effect of globalisation and called for dialogue, cooperation and tackling the “root causes of migration”, for example, by the “*eradication of poverty in regions of origin.*”

A plethora of regional processes followed: the Africa-EU Migration and Mobility Dialogue, bilateral dialogues with Turkey, Southern Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon) and African countries (Cape Verde, Nigeria, Senegal, Ethiopia, South Africa). Ten years later these noble aims were running into reality.

On the EU doorstep

By the time of the “Khartoum Process”, involving African states from the Horn of Africa, on 28 November 2014 the writing was already on the wall with 270,000 refugees arriving in the EU through the Med – nearly double the previous record of 141,000 registered refugees in 2011. The main countries of entry were Greece and Italy where most refugees simply passed through and moved north – back then there was little attempt by both countries to record those arriving under the Dublin “first country of entry rule”.

On 11-12 November 2015 there was another belated attempt to get African states onside at the Valetta Conference in Malta. On the eve of the Valetta Summit African reservations came into the open, African states are reported as being:

“Still wary of Europe’s colonial past, some Africans believe the EU is desperately trying to outsource its refugee challenges rather than accept that people will still try to come to the continent.”

The EU’s fundamental concern was to stop refugees or migrants from moving up the continent of Africa until they reach the shores of the Mediterranean – where they become the EU’s problem.

It was not until autumn 2015 that plans were put in place to create “hotspots” (closed detention centres, registration, “security screening” and the fingerprinting of refugees). These “hotspots” did not start functioning until February 2016 when patience inside the EU had already run-out.

By the end of 2015 1,000,573 people had reached Europe across the Mediterranean, mainly to Greece and Italy ([UNHCR: 30 December 2015](#)). In effect refugees simply relocated themselves throughout the EU

The “Visegard” countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) in eastern Europe had started to set their own rules building walls/fences at their borders and using tear gas and rubber bullets to turn back refugees. And other countries - Austria, Croatia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Norway and Sweden – closed their doors too. Germany, having boldly welcomed over one million asylum seekers in 2015, tightened the rules to make life harder and deportation easier.

In these and other EU countries racist and sometimes fascists groups intervened and played to a populist tune. The EU power elite became openly worried about their power-bases and were openly falling out with each other..

Time for the first “dodgy deal”

With all the doors out of Italy and Greece closed the EU reached the first “dodgy deal” deal with Turkey on 18 March 2016 and declared that Turkey was a “safe country” to send refugees back to. This agreement came in the form of two Letters and a “Statement”. The EU cast aside the rule of law and EU and international treaty obligations – in the view of many NGOs the EU was tearing up its legal obligations and relying on “messaging” (in its own words) stating that all who arrived after this date would be sent back to Turkey.

This was the start of a complete turnaround in EU policy: enough was enough, the “carrot and stick” approach of the GAMM experiment was to become one simply of the “stick” – agree now to returns and readmission, with or without a formal agreement or suffer the “consequences” by losing aid and trade.

A new era of neo-colonialism

On 7 June 2016 the Commission issued a new, quite different, strategy called “Partnership Frameworks” with the emphasis explicitly on return and readmission and a direct threat that states that did not cooperate would suffer the “consequences” through the loss of aid and trade. The Commission said it was: “Standing ready to provide greater support to those partner countries which make the greatest efforts, **but without shying away from negative incentives.**”

The Commission argues that:

*“To make change happen, the **full range of policies and EU external relations instruments have to be brought to bear. This means a change in approach and fresh thinking with a mix of positive and negative incentives and the use of all levers and tools...**”*

Feeding into “High Level Dialogues” there are “country packages” for 16 “priority countries: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The Commission’s EU development policy is to be undermined by prioritising returns, in its words:

*“Increasing coherence between migration and development policy is important to ensure that development assistance helps partner countries manage migration more effectively, and also incentivises them to effectively cooperate on readmission of irregular migrants. **Positive and negative incentives should be integrated in the EU's development policy.**”, **rewarding those countries that fulfil their international obligation to readmit their own nationals**, and those that cooperate in managing the flows of irregular migrants from third countries, as well as those taking action to adequately host persons fleeing conflict and persecution. **Equally, there must be consequences for those who do not cooperate on readmission and return...**”*

No policy areas were to be exempt from this approach:

“All EU policies including education, research, climate change, energy, environment, agriculture, should in principle be part of a package, bringing maximum leverage to the discussion.”

The plans also require:

“The facilitation of the identification of irregular migrants in view of their readmission by strengthening third countries' capacity to ensure functioning civil registries and fingerprint or biometrics digitalisation.”

Most of the targeted African states do not even have a record of births – now whole populations have to be placed on a national biometric database to meet EU demands.

As Patrick Kingsley observed in The Guardian:

“EU migration policy suggests Europe prefers strongmen over reality... The EU's new migration policy is laced with the progressive language of “migration management”, of accepting that migration flows cannot be stopped, only better managed.

But the policy's content suggests that Europe still has not accepted this reality. Once we get past the cuddly but vague nods towards resettlement and development, the main takeaway is that palling up to dictators and strongmen remains Europe's preferred method for dealing with migration. Even though they are usually the main causes of migration in the first place.”

Another “dodgy deal” with Afghanistan

On 30 September 2016 another deal was agreed with Afghanistan to start immediate refugee "return" flights. It planned the quick return of 80,000 refugees - "effectively implement readmission commitments" and by-passing EU parliamentary scrutiny. Yet again the question is asked: Is Afghanistan a "safe country"?

The endgame

We are seeing the construction of a neo-colonial project through the externalisation of Europe's asylum responsibilities by whatever means. Long-standing commitments to help those living in poverty is to be subverted by the EU's own crisis – a failure to live up to its fundamental values when confronted by a populism based on racism that in turn threatens the EU elites' hold on power.

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