



ANALYSIS DOCUMENT

The dangerous link between migration, development and security for the externalisation of borders in Africa. Case studies on Sudan, Niger and Tunisia





ATTENTION !

**« TRANSPORTER ILLEGALEMENT DES MIGRANTS
VOUS EXPOSE A UNE PEINE D'AMENDE
DE 1.000.000 A 3.000.000 F CFA »**

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Road sign on the criminalisation of the transportation of migrants, Niamey - July 2018

*Within the framework of the Externalisation Policies Watch project,
aimed at monitoring the externalisation of
Italian and European migration policies,
ARCI - in addition to its constant work
of analysis of the evolution of the agreements
signed with origin and transit countries, and to its field missions
(in Niger in July 2018, in Tunisia in May 2018 and in Sudan in December 2016)
has produced this document.*

*The report is a collection of the results of the work
described above, to alert civil society and governments
on the negative consequences of these strategies
and their implications in terms of systematic violation
of the fundamental rights of migrants
and of people living in the African countries involved*



Agadez, deposit of pick-ups seized during control operations - July 2018

The dangerous link between migration, development and security for the externalisation of borders in Africa.

Case studies on Sudan, Niger and Tunisia

Since 2015, the externalisation of borders has become a pillar of the European and Italian agenda on migration, i.e. to cooperate with countries of origin and transit to readily expel migrants from European territory or stem them before they reach the shores of Italy. Nowadays the externalisation of borders in Africa follows the misleading logic that connects migration, development and security. Added to the fact that Italy has closed its ports, this leads to an unacceptable, even higher number of deaths at sea and on land.

As mentioned in Arci's report *Steps in the process of externalisation of border controls to Africa*¹, the Valletta Summit of November 2015, in which the EU and AU, African and European countries participated, formalised the dangerous link between migration and development in Africa, from a governmental point of view. Analysis of the way in which Trust Funds² and the Italian Fund for Africa³ are used for border management clearly demonstrates this connection: even though they draw mainly on the European Development Fund (EDF), some of the projects financed by the EUTF entail the training police and border guards, provision of biometric systems designed to track people and the donation of equipment including helicopters, patrol vehicles and ships, surveillance and monitoring equipment, paving the way for further development of this tighter connection between migration, development and security. In the European-African cooperation the control dimension and the related forced and “voluntary” return definitely prevail over protection and the opening legal and safe channels for access to Europe. Two years after the Valletta summit, to assess the situation⁴, the Trust Fund was created to enhance cooperation of the local governments to control migration flows thanks to the funding of development programmes – both in countries of origin and transit – and the reinforcement of the police in all countries along the routes towards Europe. Looking at the statistics, the European strategy has been dramatically effective: in 2017 the number of illegal arrivals in Europe decreased by 67%. This reduction goes hand in hand with the drastic debasement of human rights, their violation at sea and on land, both of migrants and of people living in many of the African countries involved.

To achieve the goal summarized on several occasions by Italian politicians with the slogans “Zero-landings” or “Help them at home”, Italy and Europe have trampled both on the international conventions they are signatories to and on fundamental rights, including the right to life. Thanks to EU support, the closure of the Mediterranean route has led Italy to subcontract rescue operations to the Libyan Coast Guard, despite the full awareness, as underlined by the UN Security Council Resolution⁵, that this corps has ramified connections with militias and is guilty of violence perpetrated at sea and on land. The subcontracting of our rescue duties to Libya concurred with a very dangerous campaign of denigration against NGOs that were saving lives at sea, and today we have reached a macabre new record: more than 25,000 persons were sent back to the Libyan hell they had tried to escape, through the “pushback by proxy” procedure, plus 600 deaths in May 2018 alone. The Italy-Libya agreement of 2017, the “dialogue” with the militias managing departures and the tribes that control the south of the country, as well as the equipment supplied, and the

1 - http://www.integrationarci.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/esternalizzazione_docanalisiARCI_IT.pdf

2 - <https://concordeurope.org/2018/01/24/monitoring-cu-trust-fund-africa-publication/>

3 - https://www.actionaid.it/app/uploads/2017/12/Fondo_Africa_Il-compromesso-impossibile.pdf

4 - <http://openmigration.org/analisi/come-viene-usato-il-fondo-fiduciario-per-lafrica/>

5 - <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/migranti-raid-onu-6-trafficanti>

reinforcement of the Libyan Coast Guard implemented by the former Italian Minister Minniti, have facilitated the closure of the central Mediterranean route, which he launched and which has been developed by Ministers Salvini and Toninelli. The same logic was applied in Tunisia - both in expulsion policies and blocking the departure of migrants - and in second-border countries like Sudan and Niger. The present report focuses on latter countries. These policies carry an ever-increasing human cost, both for the people living in the countries



Left-overs of a journey through the desert in one of the pick-ups seized during control operations - July 2018

where the European troops are deployed and for the life of migrants, exposed to greater risks. As happened in the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Syria, on the central Mediterranean route as well the border between the supply of means for controlling migrants and those used instead for the control of the territory and repression of its nationals is ill-defined and changeable. The people of the African countries directly concerned have everything to lose in the reinforcement of authoritarian regimes deriving from relationships between their governments and the EU to manage migration flows. The overwhelming majority of the countries to which the EU accords priority in its efforts to externalise border management have authoritarian regimes, and they are notorious for human rights violations and a very low human development index. Obviously, for many of these countries arming themselves to become a gendarme of Europe is a pretext to develop the national arsenal, often to the detriment of their own citizens. The project ITEPA⁶ is an example of this dangerous contradiction, since through September 2017 it involved agreement between Italy and Egypt, the creation of a training center at the Egyptian Police Academy affording training for senior police officers in charge of border management and immigration from African countries. It is reasonable to wonder what the legitimacy of this operation is, in light of the authoritarian drift of the Egyptian government. And Italy does not seem to be concerned with this drift, considering that it is outweighed by Italian economic interests and the need to control migrant flows. The EU and its Member States signed agreements to legitimate the Governments of those countries while turning its eyes away from violations of human rights on the one hand, while

6 - <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/notizie/itepa-formazione-polizia-frontiera-italiana-e-quella-22-paesi-africani>

on the other providing finance, training and material support to the same governmental security organs that are mainly responsible for repression and abuses of human rights. The case of Sudan described here is certainly the most representative example in Africa, along with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. Europe remains silent over Erdogan's dictatorial drift, since Turkey is Europe's partner in blocking Afghan and Syrian refugees. A policy as dangerous as it is unconcerned with the consequences of reinforcing totalitarian systems like Sudan and Turkey, and situations of profound instability like Libya, which in the long run could force a greater number of people to leave their homes. This increase is already tangible, as is shown by the number of Sudanese – and also, though fewer, of Libyans – to land on our shores.

Tanks and helicopters, biometric and satellite systems, armies and troops: the process of externalising European border control in Africa seems more and more to evolve towards a domination of the military and security dimension. After EucapSahel which was created as an antiterrorism force and now plays a key role in border management policy, and the Italian military missions in Libya and Niger, the G5 Sahel joint force was launched; it received €100 million and was allocated another €500 million at the March 2018 Summit in order to develop its functions in the field of migration in this area. This process of militarisation of externalisation not only responds to the objective of blocking new arrivals in Europe but coincides with the interests of the Italian security industry and with internal competition to guarantee a presence that becomes more and more interesting from a geostrategic point of view. This militarisation of the externalisation of borders has indeed benefited many stakeholders: companies, particularly arms manufacturers and biometric security companies, European Member States that with the notion of war against migrants feed the collective consciousness with an enemy to be fought close to home, while being present in Africa and playing the game of territorial influence. As is shown in the latest report published by the Transnational Institut *Expanding the Fortress*⁷, the growth in border security spending has in fact benefited a wide range of companies, in particular arms manufacturers and biometric security companies. Many of their proposals have laid the foundations for political decisions in the European Agenda, such as Frontex, now the European Border and Coastguard Agency. The increasingly technology-driven Register of civil status makes it possible to expel migrants more easily from European territories and to launch a vast market in Africa. One of the main beneficiaries of the Development Trust Fund for Africa is the French company Civipol. The willingness to be “present” in Africa with national troops is part of a logic of interest: an economic logic interested in the Sahel's natural resources – gold, uranium and oil – and the political logic, in which Italy and France compete.

The border externalisation process must also be seen as an example of reducing democracy within Europe and the United States. For many of the activities and funds allocated for the implementation of these policies the democratic control of the European Parliament has been excluded; and in Italy, parliamentary ratification of the bilateral agreements has been avoided, in flagrant violation of Article 80 of the Constitution. The principle inherent in the very notion of externalisation – subcontracting to make the consequences of their policies invisible, far from the eyes of European voters – becomes more and more topical. Externalisation means pushing the legal and political responsibilities of our countries further south on the map of the world, looking for total impunity or trying to hold other countries responsible. The selection and monitoring procedures for projects funded by the Trust Fund are “non-transparent and incoherent evaluation processes” - as the Concord report observes⁸ - and the decision-making process behind the Trust Fund is in fact different from that used for the allocation of resources through the EDF.

7 - <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/expanding-the-fortress>

8 - <https://concordeurope.org/2018/01/24/monitoring-eu-trust-fund-africa-publication/>



The fundamental task of civil society associations is to analyse these policies and trace the legal and political responsibilities to those directly accountable. This is a task performed by the “externalisation policies watch” project through field missions, supporting strategic litigation, and publishing reports in order to collect and communicate information.

Women from the Horn of Africa, Agadez - July 2018



Sudan

At the heart of the migration routes, Sudan is an obligatory transit point for thousands of refugees from the Horn of Africa, but it is also a country of origin itself. Today, Sudan is the interlocutor with the EU and several Member States for the two aspects of the externalisation policy: control and expulsion. Collaboration with Omar Al-Bashir is an instrument of repression of refugees forced to transit through that country to flee, but also of Sudanese nationals in Europe who risk being systematically expelled from European territory, and of the people still living in Sudan who risk a further intensification of repression because of the stronger role of the Sudanese dictator.

During Arci's mission in Khartoum in December 2016, an activist said explicitly: "Justice will never be served in Darfur as long as your governments consider Al-Bashir a credible interlocutor for migrant control instead of interrupting all dialogue with him".

Border control

The role of Sudan as Europe's partner was formalized with the launch of the Khartoum Process in November 2014 in Rome. It continues with the allocation of a budget of €187 million from the Trust Fund for Africa and the opening of a "High-Level Dialogue" between the EU and

Omar Al-Bashir's dictatorship to achieve the Valletta objectives.

Al-Bashir clearly considers the dialogue on migration with Europe as a way to overcome the economic and political embargo imposed after the multiple arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The strategy is clear: rehabilitate Sudan in the eyes of international diplomacy at the expense of thousands of Eritreans and Sudanese fleeing their countries. For this purpose, in 2016 the Sudanese dictator deployed a new paramilitary force – the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – at the northern border with Libya for the control of outgoing migrants. The RSF include many leaders of the Janjaweed militia, notorious for its blood-stained hands in the Darfur massacre, "rehabilitated" by Al Bashir himself, who has close connections with them. The RSF legitimise their function as border controllers by proudly disclosing the numbers of arrests made in the name of collaboration with the European Union⁹. In fact, by managing migration, these murderous militiamen were rehabilitated as police forces. Since the end of 2017, it was announced that the RSF would also be deployed in the Kassala region, near the border with Eritrea, a state of emergency was then declared in the region and the border was closed on 30 December 2017 in the name of the war against traffickers. But this war actually appears to be conducted much more against refugees fleeing their homes than against traffickers, who instead have close ties with the central power. As in Libya, there is one way to go: pay. In fact, the presence of these militiamen does nothing but increase the number of interlocutors migrants are obliged to pay off and intensify the violence they suffer. This is true for Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis and for the Sudanese of Darfur, who escape northwards and find again the same militiamen that massacred their people.

Refugees Deeply describes in detail the system of corruption that characterises Sudan¹⁰: key personalities of the regime turn out to be accomplices in migrant trafficking from which they gain profits. Those who pretend to control borders in front of European officials are as a matter of fact the same people who manage the migrants' journey, filling their pockets with the money they subtract from the migrants: NISS officers – security police forces – are responsible for migrant smuggling from Eritrea to Khartoum and from there to Libya and Egypt. This is a formula that Europe already knew during the time of Gaddafi, who used to close and open the borders, making big money at the expense of people seeking refuge, in the name of cooperation with the EU.

9 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/27/eu-must-put-sudan-under-microscope-africa-summit>

10 - <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2018/01/19/sudan-the-e-u-s-partner-in-migration-crime>

The consequences of these policies are evident if we look at the number of Eritreans who have landed on our shores: from 40,000 in 2015 to scarcely 6,000 in 2017. All in all 40,773 refugees from the Horn of Africa landed on the Italian coasts in 2016, and fewer than 9,000 in 2017. This decrease is certainly not due to improved living conditions of Eritreans at home, but to the blocking operation Sudan is carrying out in the name of cooperation with the European institutions, making the journey increasingly difficult and dangerous. In Khartoum, the climate of terror in which Eritrean refugees live is tangible. In Sudan, a refugee from the Horn of Africa becomes illegal as soon as he leaves the refugee camp to which he has been assigned. They were tolerated before, but now that Al-Bashir is collaborating with the EU, they are subjected to greater repression. Concentrated in the neighbourhoods of Al-Geraif and Al-Daim of Khartoum, they live in clandestinity to avoid being arrested and sanctioned by the “public order” police, which tries behaviour considered unlawful in special courts, or conviction for violation of the Sudan’s “Passport and Immigration Act,” which imposes fines of up to 360 dollars. The Islamic-inspired public order police, historically, were established to repress all forms of dissent of local people, and now, it is deployed increasingly against foreigners, forcing them to pay from 100 to 300 dollars to be freed. Any pretext is good to take money from the refugees, whose journey northwards becomes increasingly expensive and hence more difficult. What was considered until two years ago to be the transit of refugees in flight has now officially become “illegal infiltrations into Sudanese territory”, progressively leading Sudan to close its border with Eritrea. The Sudanese Ministers are clear about how they assimilated the Brussels jargon; EU authorities cyclically go to Khartoum to negotiate the implementation of the *Khartoum Process* with European funds, denying the increasingly violent drift that characterises Al-Bashir.

The EU allocated €200 million to Sudan to control migration¹¹; an amount of money concretely spent for training and equipment of border police, strengthening the capacity of the judiciary, reforms aimed at improving the fight against migrant smuggling, as in many other countries, stemming the flow of migrants in exchange for money. Substantial efforts also focus on getting Eritrean refugees to “take root” in the refugee camps settled in the Kassala region, near the border with their home country. But this is irreconcilable with the absolute lack of security in these camps, because of continuous incursions of hitmen from Afewerky’s regime or traffickers, who kidnap Eritreans, forcing them to call their family in Europe and releasing them only for ransom. Two projects financed by the EUTF (Regional operational Centre to support the Khartoum process and the Initiative in the Horn of Africa), BMM and ROCK, are particularly worrisome; they entail the supply of control means and training of border guards, amongst whom there is a high risk of militia infiltration. This strategy, in fact, successfully circumvents the arms embargo that was rightly imposed against Sudan in the late 1990s. In particular, BMM - Better Migration Management - is a regional project financed with a total amount of \$46 million; the project is run by GIZ, the German Agency for International Cooperation, and implemented in collaboration with OIM, Italian Police and Civipol; it involves setting up a center in Dongola to help receive migrants arrested at the northern border with Libya. It will be crucial to make sure that it does not become, as it well might, the umpteenth detention camp in Africa with the European flag.

Cooperation in expelling migrants from the EU

The Sudanese Government’s cooperation on European migration policies also focuses on identifying Sudanese nationals to facilitate their expulsion from Europe. This cooperation with Italy was formalized with a police agreement¹² signed on 3 August

2016 by Franco Gabrielli, Italy’s national police chief and his Sudanese counterpart. The cooperation with Belgium and France remains informal but nevertheless active, implemented through identification missions carried out in the detention centers of Brussels and Paris. The Italy-Sudan agreement

11 - <https://www.irinnews.org/special-report/2018/01/30/inside-eu-s-flawed-200-million-migration-deal-sudan>

12 - il testo dell’accordo: https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/accordo-polizia-Italia-Sudan_rev.pdf



Migrants waiting to resume their journey to Libya, Agadez - July 2018

permitted the repatriation of Sudanese migrants, many from Darfur, arrested in raids in Ventimiglia, on a charter flight from Turin to Khartoum on 24 August 2016: that expulsion was the proving ground for the agreement signed just days before.

In this field, Italy paved the way for other Member States. France and Belgium followed the path: last September a delegation of Sudanese officials, invited by Theo Francken, the Belgian Secretary of State for Migration and Asylum, proceeded to identify its nationals. The Courts of Brussels and Liège decided to prohibit the Government from carrying out expulsions because of the risks the repatriated Sudanese would face in Sudan, but in vain. Francken, the paladin of a migration policy of closure and firmness, carried out the expulsion of more than a hundred persons in a few days. The fact that four of them would be tortured on their arrival urged the opposition party to file a no-confidence motion, thus plunging the Belgian government into crisis. Brussels risked turmoil on the issue of expulsions in Sudan. The Italian authorities are guilty of violating human rights as well, but they would have gone totally unpunished if civil society had not played its significant role – in particular, Asgi and Arci – since, along with the GUE/NGL European MPs, they met with some of the Sudanese expelled from Turin and brought their case before the European Court of Human Rights¹³.

The same veil of silence has been drawn over the cooperation between the French police and the Khartoum regime in the expulsion of political opponents since 2014; since that year, the intelligence services of the two countries have been exchanging information. A few months after the Turin-Khartoum flight, during the same period when hitmen sent by the Sudanese Government “visited” the Parc Maximilien in Brussels, the StreetPress denounced the missions between March 2016 and January 2017 of the Sudanese Military sent by the Central Government in the detention centers of Marseille, Calais and Paris to identify Sudanese nationals to be expelled¹⁴.

Recently published investigations¹⁵ reveal that a political dissident from Darfur expelled from France at the end of 2017 has reported being tortured by electric shocks and beatings with metal pipes for 10 consecutive days after his return.

13 - <https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/sudan-italia-rimpatri-cedu/>

14 - <https://www.streetpress.com/sujet/1506702391-la-france-livre-opposants-politiques-dictature-soudan>

15 - <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20180424.OBS5650/soudan-des-demandeurs-d-asile-tortures-apres-avoir-ete-expulses-par-la-france.html>

Niger

With nearly €200 million worth of projects funded so far, plus an additional €500 million for projects in the Sahel region, Niger is the main recipient of the EU Trust Fund for Africa, of the Italian Fund for Africa - €50 million conditional upon Niger committing to the creation of new specialized units necessary to patrol the borders and of new border posts - and of the development funds¹⁶. Today Niger, considered to be the “southern border of Europe,” is the most advanced laboratory of externalisation policies.

Only a few years have passed from a time when migrants travelled freely to the armed patrols and criminalisation of current days that started in 2016, yet the scenario is completely different. In Agadez, the gate to the desert and starting point of the journey, you immediately realize that the two flows, northbound and southbound, continue to coexist: invisible and criminalised the former, systematic and organized the latter, or return flow. The institution of the crime of “smuggling of migrants” by the law of 2015 forces into clandestinity anyone seeking to travel to Algeria or Libya and in some cases sail on towards Italy and Spain. The ghettos are moving further and further away into the outskirts of the city, departures are piecemeal, by night. Travelling costs are on the rise. A former “passeur” (smuggler) clearly states: “Once, travelling to Libya cost 150,000 CFA francs and 75,000 to Algeria. Now, with increased controls and risk of imprisonment, the price has gone up: 400,000 for Libya and 150,000 for Algeria”. To avoid controls, you need to rely on highly specialized smugglers, who know the roads less patrolled but who are often more unscrupulous and abandon migrants in the desert. Getting lost in that area, even just for one day, can be fatal. Thus, the burden of death of the control policies continues to increase. The Teneré, like the Mediterranean, is becoming a desert of death. In a report, Giacomo Zandonini¹⁷, an expert in the country, explains how in Libya despite the criminalisation, accesses to the country have continued. Official data, which show a decrease in northbound transits, only tell part of the story. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) paints a completely different scenario: while the number of northward passages recorded at the Séguédine checkpoint, an oasis along the main road connecting Agadez to Tummo, plummeted from 290,000 in 2016 to 33,000 in 2017, in a month, between the end of 2017 and the end of January 2018, the number of migrants who entered Libya and were counted through the Displacement Tracking Matrix database, went from 621,000 to 704,000, thus confirming a peak at the beginning of this year, and steady growth since spring 2017. Also in January 2018, according to data of the International Organization for Migration in the oasis-city of Murzuk, 300 kilometres north of Tummo, on the road to Sebha and the North, peaks of 536 accesses per day were recorded (the equivalent of the passengers on 20 Toyota pickups), which confirms the use of alternative or old unmonitored roads.

Migrants travelling northbound are as invisible as it is easy to spot, in Agadez, those travelling southbound, those rejected and escaped from Libya and Algeria waiting to get back home. According to an AP survey, 13,000 men, women and children, originally from different Sub-Saharan countries, were rejected by Algeria and sent back to Niger. While nearly three thousand would have been “unloaded” as discarded goods in Tinzaouaten, in the very dangerous Northern region of Mali. An increasingly beaten track, also as a result of the closure of the Agadez route, Algeria has reacted with systematic and terribly violent raids against migrants who are then abandoned at the Algerian southern border. In a misguided attempt to defend its case, the Algerian Ambassador in Niger stated: «We have become the container of Africa». Building on the existing agreement for the rejection of Nigerien nationals,

16 - 596 milioni di euro nell'ambito dell'undicesimo EDF – European Development Fund – per il periodo 2014-2020

17 - <http://openmigration.org/analisi/la-nuova-frontiera-europea-fra-niger-e-libia/>

within the framework of which 32,000 citizens have been rejected, since 2017 the government of Algeria has taken the opportunity to pour into the neighbouring country also migrants of other countries who have become undesired. The stories of the survivors are similar in their descriptions of the scenes of violence: raids, detention centres, trucks packed with men and animals as far as Tamanrasset, where they are abandoned some fifteen kilometres from the Nigerien border, on the dune known as “point 0.” Exhausted from the trek, they are forced to continue for the final stretch on foot, under the desert sun, fatal for the most vulnerable. All migrants report having lost or buried, along the road, someone whose remains will stay hidden under the desert sands. Often the victims are women and their children. For those who make it to Assamaka, first city at the border, there is nothing left to do but wait to resume their journey, scraping together some money, or start their return trip, taken in charge by the IOM. Robbed of all their possessions, many are left with nothing and no alternative but to reluctantly go back. Algeria makes no distinction based on the migrants’ status, thus even migrants who had lived there for years have fallen victim of the mesh of raids and deportations, arrested in their work clothes, denied the possibility to retrieve what little they had set aside in years of work. From Assamaka the



Road sign in Agadez - July 2018

IOM brings them to Arlit where they often stay, for weeks at a time, at the Agadez transit centre, from where they leave for their countries of origin. Among the greatest beneficiaries of the Trust Fund in Niger, the IOM operates on the principle of externalisation: preventing migrants from staying there or resuming their journey to the North and sending them back to their country of origin.

Since January 2018 there is another flow of people, coming back from Libya, who have decided to stop in Agadez. They are mainly Sudanese; many of them have escaped the Libyan horrors, others have arrived from the camps in Chad. They are 2000, including 200 minors and a few dozen women and children. They have come from Agadez in search of protection. Protection which neither today’s Libya nor the camps in Chad can offer them. Their presence has caused tensions between the population and the Agadez authorities who, mindful of the troops that supported Gaddafi in 2011, considered the Sudanese to be possible militiamen or fighters. The first reactions were violent, resulting in the expulsion of a hundred people into Libya. After lengthy negotiations, the High Commissioner for Refugees successfully obtained a tolerance space for them in the city. The eyes and stories of the women tell of the violence suffered in Libya, of the Sebha war, of the tortures, of the detention centres

and of the continuous abductions for ransom. In the Agadez limbo, they try to build a new future for themselves. Under UNHCR protection there are also 1361 refugees, of whom 250 are minors, evacuated from the Libyan prisons – within the framework of a humanitarian evacuation project - who are now in Niamey waiting to be resettled in a western country. Niger's government, which has strongly opposed the idea of a hotspot proposed by the European Council in June, tolerates the presence of the evacuees from Libya, provided this is only a transit hub for resettlement. Fifteen hundred people have been freed from the Libyan prisons and brought to Niamey, just a few those resettled in Europe - 200 since November - due to drip-fed solidarity on the part of Europe. The picture of migrants and refugees present in the country would not be complete without including externally and internally displaced persons, victims of the conflicts igniting the borders: 108,000 Nigerien refugees in the area of Diffa, fleeing the violence of Boko Haram, and nearly 58,000 Malian refugees who cannot return to a country worn down by continuous attacks and violence.

The attempt to close the passage towards the North started in 2015 - a few months after the Valletta Summit - with the proclamation of the law “against trafficking of human beings and smuggling of



A group of Sudanese, Agadez - July 2018

migrants” and has continued thanks to substantial funds allocated to the training and equipment of the national police and of the military forces. The resources are used on the one hand to fund projects facilitating the implementation of the law through the training of law enforcement personnel to arrest “traffickers” and confiscate the vehicles found packed with migrants and on the other hand, to fund various control systems - equipping and training for intelligence operations the police officers and ad hoc forces operating at the southern border through Niamey and Agadez. In the North of Libya, the different types of trafficking transiting through the country are controlled by the military. Poorly equipped and untrained, they patrol the outpost of Madama near Libya. Transporting migrants has been made a crime, so travelling is increasingly difficult. A sign with the European logo in plain sight at the main bus stations of Niamey reminds us that transporting migrants illegally is punishable with sanctions of between one and three million CFA francs. Controls at the bus stations are becoming stricter, as at the numerous checkpoints from the capital to Agadez. You could almost forget that Niger, which is part of the ECOWAS, must implement the free circulation protocol which interests the whole region. A “passeur” we met at the Agadez prison is fully aware that the penalty is merely a deterrent: 6 months and out. The director of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons also confirmed that the detention period is limited: the maximum punishment envisaged by law is never imposed. Sometimes, the vehicles are not even confiscated. However, the punishment is more severe in case of recidivism. With the financial instrument of the Trust Fund, the European Union has tried

to propose conversion alternatives to encourage smugglers to quit their business; however, these alternatives are limited in number and quantity. The initiative, managed by a local NGO, envisages the support of projects for a total of 1.5 million CFA francs in different sectors, from catering services to small trade and motorcycle taxis. A ludicrous amount when compared with the millions of CFA francs a smuggler could earn transporting men and women in the desert. The number of projects currently being funded is also limited: fewer than 300 for over 6,000 applications.

In a country with porous borders and surrounded by conflicts and riots - the

Libyan conflict to the North, the Malian to the west and the open fight against Boko Haram in the South-East - the fight against terrorism and the security challenge are dangerously intertwined with the fight against migration. The European heads of state met in Paris in December in 2017 to relaunch the G5Sahel - with a budget of €250 million - by giving it a new mission: the fight against the smuggling of migrants by blocking departures and transits towards Libya. It is the second group in the region, after the EucapSahel, whose scope, theoretically the fight against terrorism in one of the most unstable regions of Africa, has been widened to immigration. Stopping the migration flows has become the priority also for the missions of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in Mali and Niger. Germany “gave” the means - over a hundred pick-ups, motorbikes and satellite telephones - to increase controls along the desert routes. When talking about the need to monitor the passage of migrants, Bazoum, the Minister of Internal Affairs and negotiating partner with the European countries, clearly superimposed the trafficking of weapons, drugs and human beings to justify the involvement of his country in the fight. «The fight against the smuggling of migrants is a priority for us» - he repeated - «and if this coincides also with the interests of Europe, all the better». But Bazoum is also the one who denied Italy access to his army in the North of the country. Initially announced as operation Red Desert, then aborted, the Italian military mission in Niger was eventually resubmitted for vote to a dissolved Parliament in February 2018, with a budget of €30 million to station 400 men for 9 months in the North of the country. Reproposed by the newly-elected minister Elisabetta Trenta, in view of possible support for the American troops who are building a huge base in Agadez from which armed drones will be launched to monitor the entire region. The red light on the presence of the Italian army is probably linked to the opposition of France, which is reluctant to cede the Madama stronghold. An opposition that was immediately seconded by the Italian Minister of Internal Affairs, also in view of the next presidential elections in France, for which support from across the Alps might be useful.

The challenge of migration - in one of the world's poorest countries, despite its abundant natural resources like uranium, gold and oil - is intertwined with the geostrategic interests of military presence and control of the territory. Italy plays its part in Niger and in Libya to flank much better equipped military powers, mindless of the impact on the life of men, women and children made more and more vulnerable by these logics.



Migrants in the IOM centre, Agadez - July 2018



Portrait of a migrant, Agadez - July 2018

Tunisia

Tunisia plays an important role in Italy's and Europe's externalisation strategy, in terms of both border control and the expulsion of Tunisian citizens. The EU has identified in Tunisia a good partner for the patrolling of its coastline and a possible collaborator in intercepting migrants who set off from neighbouring Libya. To strengthen such collaboration, the EU has provided Tunisia with vessels, thus starting the cooperation within the framework of the Frontex agency and the SeaHorse Mediterranean Network project. In 2011 and 2013 Italy had already "offered" vessels to patrol its coasts, as it did with Libya. The Italian Fund for Africa, established in 2017, has allocated €12 million, which was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to the Security Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs under the item "Improved management of borders and immigration, including the fight against the smuggling of migrants and search and rescue operations". More specifically, with these funds Italy committed to provide land vehicles to patrol the coast areas and IT and teleradiocommunication equipment and to recondition the 6 patrol boats it had given to Tunisia in 2011 and 2013. In a recent communication, the European Commission has announced the allocation of a further €55 million to Morocco and Tunisia to strengthen their rescue capability, improve their border management and fight smugglers within the framework of a program managed by the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs and by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

While Tunisia has proven highly collaborative in the patrolling of its coastline and identification of its citizens with a view to expulsion, it has opposed the construction on its territory of "points of landing" of migrants set off from Libya.

The mission carried out by ARCI in May 2018, in collaboration with Asgi (Association for Judicial Studies on Immigration) and the Tunisian association FTDES (Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights), has focused mainly on the monitoring of expulsion procedures of Tunisian citizens at the airport of Palermo. The intensification of removal procedures has coincided with the arrival of Tunisian nationals on the Sicilian coasts between July 2017 and 2018, which made them the first nationality among those having arrived in Italy. Removal procedures are based on bilateral agreements between Italy and Tunisia. The historical readmission agreement of 1998 – under which access quotas provided by the Italian Decree on Migratory Flows (the "Flows Decree") was traded for collaboration in expulsion procedures – was renegotiated during the two major inflows of Tunisian migrants. The first time, in 2009, 500 migrants were deported from the island of Lampedusa in exchange for vessels to support the Tunisian Coast Guard. The second time, in April 2011, just a few weeks after the collapse of Ben Ali's dictatorship, the Berlusconi government signed an informal (still classified) agreement envisaging the removal of 40 Tunisian nationals per week. This quota was doubled in 2017, with up to two deportation flights per week. In addition to the bilateral agreements, Tunisia signed a Partnership Agreement for Mobility in 2014 which includes readmission clauses. In 2017 over 6,000 Tunisian citizens landed in Italy, 200% more than in 2016. Almost 200 migrants were intercepted by the Tunisian navy and brought back to land before leaving national waters; 2,193 were removed in the same year. Between January and September Italy organized one flight per week, but in recent months the pace has intensified with two flights per week – Mondays and Thursdays – each boarding 40 migrants. Those who were quite arbitrarily left out of this quota, were released on the territory with a deferred rejection order.

Our monitoring of expulsion procedures started in Redeyef, a city in the far south of Tunisia, at the heart of the phosphates mines basin, where the great uprisings that changed the face of the country started. This was also the point of departure for some of the Tunisians who have reached the Italian coasts over the past months. Many of them, rejected from Italy, have returned here. In Redeyef we met



Images of violence and abuse in Libya, Agadez, July 2018

30 young men at our partner association FTDES. Their voices overlap, and their stories are similar. They left from Sfax or Kerkennah, at nightfall, after hiding out for some days, waiting for the sea to calm down or for the moment when there is no trace of Tunisian soldiers patrolling the coasts, thanks to Italy's support. After travelling for a dozen hours, Lampedusa appears on the horizon. Others managed to arrive directly on the coasts of Sicily. For those who arrived in 2017 the procedure is similar: detained for weeks at the hotspot on the island, then repatriated through the Airport of Palermo where they were summarily identified by a consul. Over the past few weeks, after several reports on the hotspot of Lampedusa, permanence on the island would seem to have diminished, with consequent transfers to the hotspots of Pozzallo and Trapani or to the Repatriation Centre of Caltanissetta.

During their stay in Italy they have suffered many violations of their rights, in particular they were victims of illegal detention without judicial validation in a hotspot which has no basis in the Italian legislation, as well as of degrading treatments. Tunisian citizens reported the use of sleep medication in their food and the deception used for expulsion, letting them believe that after the transfer to Palermo they would be freed. The national guarantor of the rights of persons detained or deprived of their personal liberties, as a result of the monitoring of repatriation operations, has expressed deep concern for the «practice of not informing the interested parties of their impending repatriation in good time, in other words sufficiently in advance to allow them to verify any updates in their legal position, prepare physically and psychologically for departure and inform their family members of their return to their homeland».

The stories become more tragic for those who, after arriving in Sicily, were detained in the Repatriation Centre of Caltanissetta. H., his lip still swollen, whispers at the end of his story "In Caltanissetta, whether you stay quiet or get angry the result is always the same: violence." Beatings are the norm in this detention centre. None of the many young men we met was allowed to apply for asylum for an absurd logic according to which Italy considers Tunisians to be migrants from a safe country, in violation of the Geneva Convention, which states that each case must be considered separately based on the personal history of the applicant and not on that of the country of origin. Their wrists blocked by plastic ties, Tunisians are escorted to the airport of Enfidha, more discreet than that of Tunisi, each by two policemen. Their stories on arrival also coincide: detained for a dozen hours, they are deprived of any valuables they may have left. Repeatedly beaten and insulted, they are then released, without so much as a cent in their pockets. As they tell their stories, their eyes exude the humiliation suffered. The shame of going back empty-handed after their families had spent everything they had to send them to Europe. One thing is clear: they do not want to stay in Tunisia. For many, this is their second or third attempt. When you go back, your only thought is how to put together the 4000/5000 dinars necessary to leave again, while your life goes on in a limbo between two journeys, in dusty Redeyef.

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Printed by
CSR | Centro Stampa e Riproduzione Srl
via di Salone 131/c - 00131 Roma

*front cover: graffiti on a 'ghetto' wall
Agadez, July 2018*

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