

MIGRATION AND NEGATIVE EXTRAVERSION

Recent developments in Euro-African cooperation on migration: theoretical implications and potential effects

Ferruccio Pastore, Forum of International and European Research on Immigration (FIERI), Torino, Italy, ferruccio.pastore@fieri.it

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ABSTRACT

With refugee flows from the Middle East to Europe temporarily stemmed through the EU-Turkey deal of March 2016, Sub-Saharan Africa has recently emerged as the top priority for European migration control policies. This gives some African countries a new international relevance, and endows their governments with unprecedented diplomatic leverages in their relations with European counterparts. Building upon the work of Jean François Bayart, the paper analyses this emerging geopolitical configuration through the concept of “negative extraversion”. Based on previous research on the external dimension of European migration policies, the author tentatively identifies some potential perverse effects of unbalanced European migration strategies upon African polities and sketches an agenda for future Afro-European interdisciplinary research cooperation in this area.

1. Introduction: Africa as a growing priority for the external dimension of European migration policies

Over the last two years, the geography of unauthorised “mixed flows” (including both refugees and other categories of migrants) across EU’s external borders has changed substantially (Pastore 2015). While detections along what EU’s border agency Frontex calls the “Eastern Mediterranean route” (from Turkey across the Aegean to Greece) dropped from almost 900,000 in 2015 to 174,605 in 2016, the volume of arrivals along the “Central Mediterranean route” (from Libya to Italy) grew from around 150,000 to 181,459 (Frontex 2017).

On the one hand, this deep shift is due to the effective implementation of the control component of the extremely controversial EU-Turkey deal of March 2016 (European Commission 2017a). On the other hand, this changing distribution of the flows has to do with the persisting instability in Libya where the migratory pressure from the African continent has increasingly been concentrating (UNHCR 2017). In the words of Frontex’s analysts:

“Coinciding with the increase in the Central and Western Mediterranean, detections of African migrants reached a record high of over 180,000, compared with an average of about 40,000 detections between 2009 and 2013. This surge reveals a *steady increase in migration pressure from the African continent*, and in particular West Africa.” (Frontex 2017: 18)

The dominant perception in Brussels and the main European capitals that the Eastern Mediterranean route is temporarily closed and that the most pressing priority is now migration from Sub-Saharan Africa across North Africa and the Central Mediterranean has produced immediate repercussions on EU’s agenda setting. While the so-called “external dimension” of European migration policies traditionally had a very broad and little prioritised geographical scope (as evident, for instance, with the Global Approach to Migration launched in 2005), since 2016 an opposite approach prevails. With the “new Partnership Framework with third countries” proposed in June 2016 by the Commission (European Commission 2016a) and quickly (although selectively) endorsed by European Council (28 June 2016), a narrow set of short-term priority countries is singled out for immediate action. Besides Jordan and Lebanon, included for their key role in hosting massive amounts of Syrian refugees, all of these priority countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

This is a strikingly heterogeneous assemblage of countries, including two regional powers like Nigeria and Ethiopia, two among the poorest world’s countries (Mali and Niger), and one traditional and “easier” partner like Senegal. The only common denominators amongst the five being a) their role as origin and/or transit zones in current unauthorised and unwanted flows aiming at Europe, and b) the apparent viability of some political cooperation in this field. In fact, other key countries, like Eritrea or Sudan, have not been included due to their internal political situation, which would probably make it too embarrassing for the EU to engage directly.

These are just the EU’s immediate priorities, but a wider target is represented by the expanding pool of potential beneficiaries (26 countries, with the inclusion of Ghana, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire in February 2017) of the “Trust Fund for Stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa”, established by the Valletta Summit in November 2015 and currently worth around 2.5 billions.

In at least one policy field, therefore, describing Africa as Europe’s top priority is not a paradox nor a provocation. It is an emerging fact with deep implications both from a practical point of view, with regard to the contents and prospects of the political relations between the European Union, its member states and African countries, and from a theoretical point of view, as concerns the evolving modes of interaction among these actors.

In the next pages, I will first provide some additional background information, with particular regard to some recent trends in the external dimension of European migration policies (Section

2). I will then move to an overview of the academic literature on this increasingly relevant dimension of European (and more generally Western, or stemming from the “global North”) migration policies, highlighting its very partial focus and strong euro-centric bias (Section 3). In Section 4, drawing mainly on the path-breaking work of Jean-François Bayart (2000; 2009), I will introduce the concept of “negative extraversion” as a tool to analyse the impact of the increasingly heavy European migration-related conditionality on African political counterparts. I will then devote some concluding remarks (Section 5) to the potential role of cooperative Afro-European research for the rethinking and rebalancing of EU-Africa migration policy agenda.

2. The evolving (and contradictory) contents of European foreign migration policies

The geopolitical earthquakes in the EU’s neighbourhood since 2011 have brought to unprecedented levels of exposure of the bloc to unplanned (and largely unwanted) migration. Feeling seriously threatened, in a context of growing public anxiety and ruthless political competition over migration issues, European governments and institutions have first made some attempts to find internal solutions through a fairer distribution of reception and protection “burdens” among member states. Since this strategy has blatantly failed, policy efforts have been concentrating more and more on external responses aimed at preventing migration and/or at stopping migrants.¹

But preventing migration or stopping migrants are clearly not the same. A certain level of ambivalence or even ambiguity about real priorities and ultimate goals of the external dimension of migration policies has in fact characterised EU action in this field since its beginnings.² On the one hand, it was always clear and explicit that stemming “illegal” migration was a key goal, pursued not just by combating organised human smuggling,³ but also by deterring, blocking and if necessary repatriating individual unauthorised migrants.

But since the end of the 1990s, on paper at least, external migration strategies became less exclusively focused on law enforcement and more comprehensive: not just coercive but also preventive. Although at the time a majority of European states was ruled by Centre-Left majorities, this programmatic turn was not just driven by ideological concerns. The awareness started growing that dealing with migration from poor countries only through repressive means could entail serious diplomatic backlashes and other types of unwanted side effects in the medium and long term (see Section 5).

Since the end of the last century, a more balanced approach to the external dimension of migration has even become routine at EU level, at least at rhetorical level. If one reads any of the frequent and lengthy official blueprints, Europe’s foreign migration policy is not just about stemming unauthorised flows. It is also about preventing them, by creating legal alternatives, by informing about the risks of irregular migration and, above all, by addressing the “root causes” of

¹ For a more detailed reconstruction of the complex dynamics in the European policy response to the so-called “migration and refugee crisis”, see Pastore 2017a, where I have provided an analysis of the rapid and dramatic shift from a prevalent emphasis on “internal” responses to “external” ones, with Africa as a core priority.

² For a seminal contribution, along these lines, see Boswell 2003.

³ A critical milestone, from this point of view, was the adoption of the protocols against smuggling and trafficking attached to the 2000 Palermo convention against transnational organised crime. European were a decisive force behind this important development that paved the way for a global criminalisation of behaviours that until then had been treated as harmless (and were often very popular) almost everywhere, except in a handful of Western immigration states.

the phenomenon.⁴ For instance, according to the “European Agenda on Migration” (European Commission 2015), the most encompassing planning document to date, the EU’s migration strategy rests on four pillars: i) “Reducing the incentives for irregular migration”; ii) “Saving lives and securing external borders”; iii) fulfilling “Europe’s duty to protect” through “a strong common asylum policy”; and last, but officially not least, iv) “a new policy on legal migration”.

On paper, all four pillars are equal and built in parallel. In practice, however, the degree of priority is extremely uneven and, if one looks at the discourse of the real power holders, i.e. at European Council’s (instead than Commission’s) documents, this becomes quite explicit. In June 2016, for instance, the Heads of state and government made it very explicit that in this particular field one policy goal (i.e. the repatriation of unauthorised migrants) was far more pressing than others, by stating that “cooperation on readmission and return will be a key test of the partnership between the EU and [its] partners” (European Council conclusions, 28 June 2016, point 2). When meeting again in December 2016, the 28 leaders once more singled out one privileged strategic objective when they called upon Member States “to continue and step up their engagement under the Partnership Framework’ declaring that they ‘will keep progress on stemming the flows and improving return rates under close review” (European Council conclusions, 15 December 2016, point 2).

Under growing political pressure, with electoral outcomes throughout the European Union increasingly conditioned by migration issues, this hierarchy of priorities (i.e.: “coercion first, prevention and opening of legal migration avenues maybe later”) seems to have gradually been interiorised also by the European Commission. As a matter of fact, also for the usually more principled and rights-based Brussels-based executive body, “the overall philosophy appears to be ‘whatever works’” (Lehne 2016).

This shift is, for instance, made very clear by the way in which ongoing cooperation with Niger – one of the priority countries of the EU’s New Partnership Framework and currently the main transit corridor from all of West Africa to Libya and Italy – is described in the one of the latest updates by the Commission:

“Cooperation with Niger as a key transit country continues to be effective. [...]There has been a clear decline in departures of migrants from Agadez towards Europe (from the peak of 70 000 departures in May to 6 524 in January 2017). The number of migrants being directed towards the International Organisation for Migration for repatriation has increased, together with voluntary returns.” (European Commission 2017b: 3)

Meanwhile, the development projects in the region of Agadez meant to address the root causes of migration and to provide economic alternatives to the smuggling industry are mostly still in a negotiation or planning phase. With the little more than symbolical exception of a training project for brick-making and the production of jewellery that has so far benefitted (the unimpressive number of) 600 persons (Ibidem; see also European Commission 2017c).

⁴ For an analysis of the plurality of strategic approaches (and of the associated rhetorics) used by European governments and institutions in this field, see Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011.

3. The euro-centric bias of most academic literature on the “external dimension” of migration policies⁵

As I will argue in the next section, the recent evolution of European migration policies towards Sub-Saharan Africa is deeply affecting not only Afro-European relations at different levels, but also internal political dynamics in several African countries. This broad impact of European migration policies, however, has so far been largely neglected by academic literature on migration policies.

European studies and European migration studies have mainly analysed the emergence of an “external dimension” in the EU migration and asylum policies from an “internal” perspective, as a further development in the process of Europeanization of migration and asylum policies. From this point of view, the suppression of internal border controls in the Schengen area has required not only an enhanced cooperation among member states, but also an increased cooperation with countries of origin and transit in order to strengthen controls at the EU external borders and to deter and curtail irregular migration into the EU.

Therefore, according to Boswell (2003), the process of externalization was to some extent the “natural continuation” of the process of Europeanization of migration and asylum policies. Similarly, Lavenex has highlighted the continuity between internal communitarisation (“shifting up”) and external widening (“shifting out”) of European migration policies, with migration law enforcement as a constant priority (Lavenex 2006: 330).

In line with this introverted perspective on the external dimension of migration policies, a number of scholars have emphasized also the role played by European national bureaucracies both in Europeanization and externalization processes (Guiraudon 2000, 2003, Guiraudon and Lahav 2000, Lavenex 2006). According to these authors, both processes can essentially be interpreted as strategies by interior ministries and immigration officials to emancipate themselves from normative and institutional constraints on their essentially restrictive and control-oriented approaches to migration policy-making.

Even though these studies represent an interesting key to interpretation of the externalisation of migration policies, they are overall characterised by a Euro-centric approach that frames EU external policies in the area of migration as part of the EU integration process, with little attention to their impact on “partner countries” outside Europe.

Along with literature that has tried to explain the reasons for and main features of the externalisation of EU migration policies towards its southern neighbourhood, there is an abundant literature that has addressed this process critically, from different perspectives and involving various disciplines. Critical legal scholars have typically criticised EU external migration policies from a human rights perspective, focusing on how “*non-entrée* policies” (Hathaway 1992) and cooperation with third countries in the area of migration management and border control may hamper migrants’ access to protection and right to asylum (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2006, 2011, 2012, 2014, Gammeltoft-Hansen and Hathaway 2015) or on how States may bear a responsibility for migrant deaths occurring as an indirect effect of their restrictive migration policies (Spijkerboer 2007, 2013).

Critical migration studies have often shared a prevalent geographical focus on the Mediterranean region, identifying the securitisation of migration as one of the essential features of externalisation (Huysmans 2000, 2006, Collyer 2006, Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002, Lutterbeck 2006, Bigo 2005).

⁵ This section builds upon the research carried out in the framework of the Medreset Project (<http://www.medreset.eu/>) funded under the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 Programme for Research and Innovation. I would like to thank my colleague Dr. Emanuela Roman for her advice and substantial contribution.

Also the increasing involvement of private actors and international organizations in the management of migration at or outside the borders of the EU, has been an important topic for critical migration studies. Delegation of archetypical State functions to non-state actors has often been interpreted as a way to maximize the effectiveness and minimize the costs and visibility of measures and operations in the fields of migration control, border surveillance, migration detention and forced return. Several scholars have focused on migration management as a way for international organizations like the IOM and the UNHCR to legitimize and expand their role and activities, to affirm their own logic, and to partly emancipate themselves from their own funders - i.e., the states (Triandafyllidou 2014, Geiger and Pécoud 2014, Korneev 2014).

In a similar vein, migration management has often been analysed as a lucrative business for private actors, as an “industry” producing profits and specific “services”, i.e. assistance to migrants in organizing migration or to States in controlling it (Andersson 2014, Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sorensen 2013).

A contiguous cluster of critical literature on the governance of irregular migration to Europe is increasingly concerned with the issue of human smuggling. A number of scholars have examined the criminalisation of migrant smuggling and have denounced the dominant criminological approach characterising research on this topic, as well as the framing processes that have resulted in smugglers being over-simplistically represented as criminals (Baird 2016, Achilli 2015, Tinti and Reitano 2017; for a comprehensive analytical and critical literature review on migrant smuggling, see Baird and van Liempt 2016). At the policy level, some of these authors have claimed that European policy responses aimed at countering migrant smuggling should go beyond a dominant security-oriented approach and be accompanied by more structural and comprehensive solutions, including accessible pathways for people in need of protection to cross the Mediterranean into Europe (Achilli and Sanchez 2017).

Most of these different branches of critical literature on EU external migration policies do also share a certain Euro-centric approach, if only because their criticism is based on European categories and discourses.⁶

In contrast, some international relations (IR) scholars have adopted an alternative perspective, arguing that far from being solely a unilateral process whereby the EU and its Member States export migration control instruments outside their territory, EU external migration policies towards origin and transit countries consist of a network of complex and ever-changing bilateral and multilateral relations, whereby the EU, its member states and third countries exercise power or pressure on the counterpart across different policy fields (Paoletti 2010, 2011a, 2011b, Cassarino 2005, 2007, 2010, Pastore 2002, Paoletti and Pastore 2010, Pastore and Trinchieri 2008, Pastore 2016). According to these scholars, the EU external dimension cannot be understood only in terms of “mechanical” delegation of migration controls at the expense of countries of origin and transit (as it has traditionally been) but rather as a “bargaining process”, where both parties involved are able to affect the behaviour of their counterpart using all

⁶ A sharp criticism of the Western-centric bias of most academic literature and of dominant theories on migration policies is the one levelled by Natter in an important recent contribution (2017). Among the few exceptions highlighted by Natter, most are sectorally focused on emigration and diaspora policies (de Haas and Vezzoli 2011; FitzGerald 2006; Gamlen 2008; Iskander 2010; Miller and Peters 2014) or on specific cases of bilateral or multilateral cooperation (Adepoju, van Noorloos and Zoomers 2010; Fine 2015; Lavenex and Uçarer 2002). A few other studies of migration policies in non-Western contexts are identified (Garcés-Mascreñas 2012; González-Murphy and Koslowski 2011; Paoletti 2011; Poutignat and Streiff-Fénart 2010), but they are also criticised as partial or superficial, as “often limited to historical or descriptive accounts of policy developments, [or because they] treat states as single, coherent entities without paying attention to their fragmentations, do not grant them autonomy of their decision making in front of international actors, or ignore the dynamics between civil societies and administrations within those countries.” (Natter 2017: 4).

instruments at their disposal, not only in the area of migration, but also in other policy areas (e.g., foreign affairs, trade, development, energy, security).

4. Negative extraversion as a conceptual tool to make sense of the impact of migration-related conditionality in African contexts

A non-mechanical and non-univocal understanding of political relations between migration-receiving and migration-sending countries, like the one advocated by the authors cited at the end of last section, crucially implies the recognition of the agency of the latter group of countries on the international scene. In the case of Sub-Saharan African sending countries, this is an important and not self-evident implication. As a matter of fact, Africa has traditionally occupied a marginal and theoretically blurred position in the field of International Relations and international political studies (Dunn and Shaw 2001, Gruffyd Jones 2005, Nkiwane 2001). And when African countries South of the Sahara have occasionally peeped out on the IR scene, they have normally done so in second lead roles, mechanically and passively responding to external constraints and more specifically to the political will of their stronger Western and Northern counterparts.

This understanding of the international role of Sub-Saharan African countries, while generally unsatisfactory, appears particularly unsuited to analyse the relations with European countries and institutions in the field of migration management. In trying to overcome this analytical obstacle, a valuable conceptual help comes from the theory of extraversion developed by Jean-François Bayart (2000, 2009). In his historical sociology of the state in the African context, Bayart distances himself from the mainstream of the dependency theory and from the classical work of authors like Walter Rodney and Basil Davidson, arguing that asymmetries of wealth and power are far from necessarily implying passiveness:

“... the uneven and asymmetrical character of the relations between Africa on the one hand, and Asia and Europe on the other, which was accentuated from the 1870s onwards and culminated in the military occupation of the continent, does not exclude the possibility that Africa may have played an active role throughout this long process of reduction to a state of dependency.” (Bayart 2000: 218).

Extraversion as a strategy of governance and a form of agency is then precisely defined as the capacity of African elites to “compensate for their difficulties in the autonomization of their power [by] intensifying the exploitation of their dependants by deliberate recourse to the strategies of extraversion, mobilizing resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment” (Bayart 2009: 21).

In Bayart’s account, the primary (although not the only⁷) way in which African oligarchies “capture” the “rent generated by dependency” (Bayart 2000: 222) is through their capacity to act as gatekeepers controlling the access of external actors to domestic natural resources (including, for centuries, human resources in the form of slaves) and extracting value from this intermediation. This historically consolidated (and still very actual) form of “positive” extraversion

⁷ Migration, in particular, is not absent from Bayart’s conceptual framework. On the contrary, “flight”, i.e. the more or less forced migration of refugees and displaced persons, is singled out as one the six major “formalities of action” which constitute the basic “grammar” of the relations between Africa and the rest of the world. However, migration is not considered as a strategic diplomatic resource for African states, as it is increasingly becoming, but merely as an individual option for African people and one of several forms of bottom-up connection between Africa and its richer neighbours:

“...flight is not tantamount to disconnecting oneself from the world, as it may seem at first sight, but is rather a mode of insertion or reinsertion into world affairs, and even of globalisation.” (Bayart 2000: 261)

(“positive” in that it builds upon Western greed to appropriate African resources) can, in my view, be juxtaposed to and complemented by an emerging form of extraversion that I propose to qualify as “negative”, because it capitalizes on perceived threats stemming from Africa, that Western actors want to prevent or avert. In this context, the profit margin for African leaderships resides in their capacity to assure (or at least convince) Europe of their ability to keep such threatening phenomena under control, presenting themselves as credible candidates for effective security outsourcing.

“Negative extraversion” is obviously not an entirely new phenomenon, nor does it apply only to migration. Another area in which the concept can fruitfully be applied is, for instance, that of transnational organised crime and terrorism. Amongst recent examples, one could think of the decisive role that the growing perception of the threat associated with transnational terrorist organisations operating in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region, had in President Bush’s decision to set up a United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2008, and in the parallel upgrade of military and intelligence cooperation with a number of African countries.

But with migration, things are different in at least two crucial respects. On the one hand, it is perceived as a *much more diffuse threat*, one that does not stem from however blurred galaxies of militants but potentially from Africa’s rapidly expanding population as a whole.⁸

On the other hand, in comparison with terrorism, the “African migration threat” is perceived as *less global in nature*. Although human smuggling networks are generally growing in power and sophistication, in the African case they are still essentially regional or continental in reach. The pressure felt in Europe is not felt, for instance, in North America (it is not by chance that African migration does not feature high in the rich catalogue of migratory obsessions of the Trump administration!). The relatively limited reach of smuggling networks has important strategic implications: dealing with Africa’s present and future migration is perceived as a real issue only by European governments (and not by all at the same degree), certainly not by the US administration nor by the international community as a whole.

But getting back to Europe, mixed migration flows from Africa have undoubtedly become a major Achilles’ heel, with ever more evident geopolitical implications. The leaderships of states embodying a tangible migration threat for Europe are thus placed in a new and potentially very convenient strategic position where they can provide their services as proxy migration controllers at very high prices. The two most resounding precedents are worth reminding here. A first example of the profit opportunities deriving from Europe’s migration fears came with the Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation, signed by Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi and Libyan *rais* Muammar Gaddafi in August 2008. In that case, the price for cooperation was set in 5 billion dollars to be paid by Italy mainly in kind (i.e. with infrastructures financed through a raise in taxes over Italian energy companies operating in Libya) over twenty years. But the most spectacular advertisement of the lucre potential associated with Europe’s migratory Achilles’ heel came with the signature of the EU-Turkey deal of March 2016, worth 6 billions euros over a much shorter lapse of time.

5. Studying migration-related negative extraversion in practice: a research agenda with policy implications

The long-term detrimental effects of “positive” extraversion (i.a. reinforcement of the autocratic features of African political systems, systematic depletion of economic and human resources,

⁸ For the most recent projections on the demographic future of Africa, see United Nations, World Population Prospects. The 2015 Revision, UNDESA-Population Division, New York, 2015.

disincentives to local economic accumulation and investment, powerful perverse incentives to protracted civil and international conflicts, etc.) have been widely studied.⁹ On the contrary, targeted empirical research on the effects of migration-related “negative extraversion” on specific African contexts is still virtually non-existent.

This article is just a preliminary and mainly conceptual exploration of some important emerging phenomena and it does not have any systematic empirical ambition. Based on my past research on the external dimension of European migration policies, however, it is possible to tentatively identify several possible orders of perverse effects of an unbalanced approach indiscriminately prioritising migration controls and the “struggle against illegal migration” over the promotion of legal mobility and the prevention of forced migration.

A first possible risk is that a unbalanced and overly repressive externalisation of migration controls undermines the political stability of African “partner states” of origin and transit. Different dynamics can concur in generating such perverse effect. In a context of negative extraversion such as the one described above, the primary political interlocutors of European states mainly interested in the outsourcing of migration controls tend to be security apparatuses. In polities (not just in Sub-Saharan Africa of course) where the democratic control on the military and police is already limited, this additional external incentive may lead to further concentrations of power. The authoritarian involution observed in Turkey after the signature of the March 2016 migration deal, or the recent worsening of political repression in Ethiopia in a phase of strong intensification of migration cooperation with the EU, can partly be explained in this way.

The almost obsessive emphasis put by European and international actors on border security and the countering of irregular migration can have a noxious influence on African political behaviours also in another sense, namely by discouraging openness towards intra-African refugee flows. Such a dynamic is in fact already at work, as effectively summarised by Siphon Mthathi, Oxfam’s Executive Director in South Africa, in a powerful intervention before an audience of EU leaders at the European Development Days:

“Governments in Africa are watching what Europe is doing. They see how Europe wants to prevent migration because Europeans think of migration as a problem. As a consequence, some of our governments are changing their approach and copying the European template. They have started to make deals with other countries to make sure that people stay there. [...] Some African governments are now using Europe as an excuse for not taking responsibility. They say: ‘If Europe doesn’t do it, why should we – with fewer resources – do it? The European approach seems to be that they want to pay, and somebody else will take responsibility. But it’s creating a chain reaction where nobody takes responsibility.”¹⁰

But an excessive focus on migration restrictions and on the readmission of deportees can have destabilising effects also by undermining popular consensus for African governments that accept to perform a containment role on behalf of European states of destination. Several observers have argued, for instance, that the iron lid on the geographical mobility of Arab youth, imposed by Schengen’s Europe but enforced by North African autocrats, had a significant role in generating the explosive tension that led to the 2011 uprisings.¹¹

⁹ For a compelling analytical reconstruction of these self-destructing mechanisms, see Bates 2008.

¹⁰ Speech given on 20 June 2017, full text available here: http://oxfameu.blogactiv.eu/2017/06/20/africa-to-eu-live-up-to-responsibility-on-migration/?utm_source=EurActiv+Newsletter&utm_campaign=e32a813b96-Bmail&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bab5f0ea4e-e32a813b96-245335561.

¹¹ There seems to be a growing awareness also among African governing elites of the potentially disruptive impact in loco of repressive migration policies induced by exogenous conditionality. A striking sign comes from a very explicit passage – almost a sort of general “safety clause” - of the “Memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the development sector, to combat illegal immigration, human trafficking and contraband and on reinforcing the border security” signed by the Italian prime minister

Furthermore, exogenous restrictions on international mobility can have detrimental side-effects on regional political and economic dynamics. This is for instance happening in Western Africa, where the European emphasis on reinforcement of border controls risks to hamper, if not to thoroughly disrupt, the already difficult economic integration within the transnational space of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Finally, a security-driven externalisation of European restrictive migration strategies, if not accompanied by parallel and tangible development advances, risks to produce unintended and negative effects on the specific dynamics of irregular migration, by boosting professional smuggling and corruption among border guards, as well as by redirecting flows along more remote and dangerous routes. Such dynamics, well documented for instance along the Mexico-US border (Andreas 2009), can now be observed in the North of Niger and elsewhere in the Sahara.¹²

All these potentially harmful side effects of European migration strategies and of the negative extraversion patterns that they risk to induce are completely neglected in the European public debate and greatly underestimated in policymaking circles.

Documenting such dynamics is a complex research (and journalistic) endeavour for several reasons. From a methodological and epistemological point of view, because it requires in-depth and systematic cooperation across disciplines and between European and African scholars. From a practical point of view, this emerging research agenda may be hampered by the difficulties to have access to the field (e.g. in border regions or in the remote areas where refugee camps are often located) due both to logistic obstacles and political restrictions.

But, however challenging, this is a very important research agenda, both because empirically and theoretically innovative, and because highly politically relevant. As a matter of fact, if the perverse dynamics that I have tentatively described are not carefully considered and countered through a more balanced and cooperative approach, EU-driven migration strategies in Africa are at high risk of backfiring thus eventually reinforcing the very “push factors” of forced migration that they are meant to mitigate.

Paolo Gentiloni and the head of the Libyan National Reconciliation Government Fayez al-Serraj on 2 February 2017:

“Recognizing that measures and initiatives undertaken to solve the irregular migrants’ situation in accordance with this Memorandum don’t have to damage in any way the Libyan social fabric or threaten the demographic equilibrium of the Country or the economic situation and the security conditions of Libyan citizens.”

(unofficial English version available at: <http://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ITALY-LIBYA-MEMORANDUM-02.02.2017.pdf>. The official Italian version is available at: http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/02/02/news/migranti_accordo_italia-libia_ecco_cosa_contiene_in_memorandum-157464439/).

It is worth recalling that the MoU is for the time being not effective as it was suspended by a Libyan court in March 2017 (see: http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2017/03/23/migranti-media-stop-corte-tripoli-allintesa-italia-libia_66fd51be-3b7e-4792-971c-e6002a0b50d2.html).

¹² See, for instance, Flynn 2015 and Raineri 2017. The redirection of irregular migration flows along alternative routes is now officially acknowledged also by the European Commission: “... the decrease registered [along traditional routes] does not necessarily translate into a one on one reduction of the overall flow reaching Libya, as new routes by-passing the reinforced border controls are being exploited. These new routes are more difficult to use and riskier, leading to higher prices demanded by the smugglers for transport, and higher risks for the migrants” (European Commission 2017c: 4).

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