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Migration and Trade Policy in Europe

European development policy is increasingly being subordinated to EU trade policy – an „exclusive“ domain of the European Commission. This also applies to the European migration policy, which is one of the key topics of the EU's working programme in 2008 and has top priority for the French Presidency.

The Warsaw based EU border security agency FRONTEX was established in October 2004. FRONTEX provides the legal framework for catching refugees in the Mediterranean Sea with ships, aircraft and well-equipped police units. These „rescued“ refugees are transported back to Africa where they are kept in camps in Libya and other African countries. For the former EU-Commissioner Frattini (in charge of Justice, Freedom and Security) FRONTEX is the basis for joint border protection, for the „Information Centre on Militarization“ (IMI) FRONTEX is „part of the new European security architecture“, which is being expanded more rapidly „than the establishment of political institutions which are able to control it.“ (IMI-Analysis 2007/015, April 2007)

According to the annual 35 page report issued by FRONTEX in 2006, 5000 people from Africa were prevented from travelling to Europe. According to the report, 3887 refugees in 57 boats were stopped close to the African coast and „redirected“. The report does not give any information to which countries the refugees were transported. FRONTEX's Executive Director, Ilkka Laitinen, stresses that the annual reports do not provide any information on the agency's operative activities, as such information could threaten the success of the missions.

In April 2007, the European Parliament adopted a regulation „on the creation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams“, approving an extension of the FRONTEX operation and hence establishing the legislative basis for the so-called Rapid Border Intervention Teams – RABITs.

These units can be deployed in „exceptional circumstances“ for a limited period of time. The required technical equipment will be made available if needed by means of a new equipment catalogue, the Centralised Record of Available Technical Equipment (CRATE), created for this purpose.

On the occasion of the 11th European Police Congress at the end of January 2008 in Berlin, Frattini confirmed the establishment of a unified border surveillance system in order to detect citizens from third countries whose visas have expired. With this new system a Europe-wide public manhunt will be launched in order to deport „illegal immigrants“.

Due to the „efficient“ FRONTEX surveillance system the number of refugees has already dropped drastically, particularly in Spain and Italy, while the number of refugees in Morocco has increased substantially.

As surveillance in the short sea route from Africa to Europe is quite „efficient“, the refugee boats are choosing more dangerous routes and now depart from the Côte d'Ivoire or Guinea to the Canary Islands. This is one of the reasons why more and more people are drowning. Spanish media reports recorded the deaths of 400 people in 2007. NGOs even speak of numbers amounting to more than 1000 people who paid with their lives for the dream of a new life in the „European paradise“. Overall, it is estimated that at least ten thousand people have died over the last decade in attempts to cross the EU's southern borders.

If refugees have no possibility of entering into „safe“ states then the right to asylum is being denied and this is thus in breach of the Geneva Convention on Refugees as well as the New York Protocol, both of which prohibit countries from turning back refugees without having had the opportunity to apply for refugee status.

„Return-Directive“– A „Directive of Shame“

In June 2008 the Council of Ministers for Justice and the Interior adopted the so-called „Return-Directive“ (also approved by the European Parliament) which allows the detention of illegal immigrants for up to 18 months. The Bolivian President Evo Morales reacted to this „Directive of Shame“, as it is called by the migrant associations, in an open letter to the European governments denouncing the return directive as a „huge infringement of human rights...Mothers with children could be arrested, without regard to family and school, and put in detention centres, where we know depression, hunger strikes and suicides happen. How can this be tolerated? At the same time, the EU is trying to convince the Andean Community of Nations (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) to sign an ‘association agreement’ that includes a free trade agreement of a similar nature to that imposed by the US. We are under intense pressure to accept demands for liberalisation of our trade, financial services, intellectual property rights and public works. Under so-called ‘judicial protection’ we are being pressured to denationalise water, gas and telecommunications. Where is the ‘judicial protection’ for our people seeking new horizons in Europe? If the return directive becomes law, we will not be morally able to deepen negotiations with the EU, and we reserve the right to legislate so European citizens have the same obligations for visas that Europe imposes on the Bolivians, according to the diplomatic principle of reciprocity. The social cohesion problems that Europe is suffering now are not the fault of migrants, but the result of the model of development imposed by the north, which destroys the planet and dismembers human societies. I appeal to European leaders to drop this directive and instead form a migration policy that respects human rights, and allows us to maintain the movement of people that helps both continents.” (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jun/16/eu.immigration>)

This appeal did not have any positive impact. On the contrary, at the end of July, the reactionary Italian government of Silvio Berlusconi took a drastic step by declaring a national state of emergency to deal with the „exceptional and persistent influx“ of irregular immigrants. The Minister of Interior, Roberto Maroni, stated that this decision had the aim of „intensifying efforts to combat and control the [immigration] phenomenon.”

The decision came shortly after Italy passed another controversial piece of law that would make undocumented migration a criminal offence punishable by six months to four years in prison. The law also permits property rented to immigrants to be confiscated.

Since the beginning of August, 3000 soldiers are patrolling five Italian cities chasing illegal immigrants and petty criminals. This militarization was heavily criticized by the country's centre-left opposition, who argued that this would result in „confusion and alarm” and boost xenophobic sentiments across the country.

In June, the Berlusconi government also found itself under heavy criticism for plans to conduct a census, under which all Roma people, including children, would be fingerprinted. Critics from the left parties in Italy compared these measures to the policies of Benito Mussolini, the former fascist leader of Italy.

At the European summit in October, the Council of the European Union will adopt a European Pact on Immigration and Asylum which will give directives on how to fight illegal migration and expel more „illegal” immigrants, while promoting legal migration and a common asylum policy by 2010. EU officials argue that the European Union must become tougher on illegal immigration in order to convince voters to accept legal migrants who are needed to counteract the problems of an ageing population, which the EU is facing. A week later the second Euro-African inter-ministerial conference on migration and development is to take place in Paris.

A large network of migrant, women and social organisations are calling upon progressive, social movements to join the counter migration summit in Paris (October 17th and 18th) to promote another vision of immigration and another type of relationship between the European Union, Africa and the rest of the world. They are also organising the second non-governmental Euro-African conference and a big rally to request another European policy:

France is planning to suggest to its European counterparts that they adopt agreements on a „concerted management of migration flows and co-development” as a model of negotiation through which it will promote selective immigration, and ask Southern countries to accept its nationals back home as well as those of other countries who have passed through their territory.

The organisations signing this appeal are concerned by the treatment given to migration flows, which is essentially focused on security and is responsible for thousands of deaths; and by the economic choices made that prevent development in African countries. They are launching this appeal to give a voice to European and African civil societies. It is high time that the issue of migration and development be really considered in terms of common interests: i.e. interests shared by the countries of origin, by the countries migrants go through, by the destination countries, but most importantly, the interests of the migrants themselves. We want

another Europe than the one that is becoming a fortress and that is taking disproportionate measures to prevent people from entering its territory and expel those who have entered. We reject the systematisation of detention centres and forced returns”.

<http://www.gisti.org/index.php>, www.fsmm2008.org

Xenophobia, racism and neo-Nazism

Xenophobia, racism and neo-Nazism are on the rise in all European countries. Very worrying is the situation in the Eastern European countries where the Roma population is suffering severe discrimination and poverty. According to studies, 30% of the students in Eastern European countries are far right and appear to share the Nazi's beliefs and convictions.

Almost two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the former Soviet Block the impact of the restoration of capitalism in the „ex-communist” countries is quite clear. Far from bringing democracy or improved social conditions to all, the introduction of the market economy has plunged broad layers of the population into social misery. The extreme right is attempting to channel widespread frustration over social crisis into nationalistic fantasies and racist hysteria. This tendency can be observed in all European countries.

The argument of the threat of terrorism is being used to justify increasing militarization internally and externally. Social and civil rights are sacrificed in order to protect the rights of the capital and the rights of the free market. This undermines democratic values and social systems as well as Human Rights.

Illegal migration is profitable

While there are harsh complaints about the allegedly high number of refugees or „illegal immigrants”, the advantages that illegal migration brings for whole sectors of the economy are concealed. It is fairly widely known that the large-scale vegetable and fruit farms in Spain are making considerable profits from illegal workers – many of these are women who work in kind of slave situations for „starvation wages”. The number of those working illegally in the service and catering sectors in many EU-countries is also very high. Fear of discovery forces women – the majority of these slave workers are female – to accept scandalously low wages and harsh working conditions. .

The EU Commission claims that the EU member states will need 20 million workers over the next 20 years from Third countries. In order to select the „appropriate

workers” and to control the flow of illegal migrants a EU recruitment office, called the Centre d'information et de gestion des Migrations/CIGM, will be opened in Mali in October 2008. The office will manage the flow of African workers for companies in the EU and hence will ensure the influx of cheap labour to Europe. Another recruitment office is planned to be opened in Senegal.

The German EU presidency set in motion the so-called „circular migration” with selected “mobility partnership countries”. Currently, workers from Moldavia and the Cap Verde Islands enjoy this „mobile partnership” and are allowed to enter the European labour market to work for a short period at the request of European companies.

The migrant workers are being misused as an „industrial reserve army”. They can hence be used to force national workers to accept lower wages and new „reforms” which will be introduced in the framework of the new cycle of the Lisbon strategy in 2008. The new Lisbon strategy envisages additional „reforms” such as the “modernisation of public administration”, i.e. more public private partnerships, more competitiveness and liberalisation of the internal market, more „flexicurity” on the labour market which entails e.g. the extension of working hours.

(The European Council adopted the “flexicurity” principles at its meeting December 14, 2007:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st16/st16201.en07.pdf>)

Even the European Council recognises the link between migration and employment: „There is a close link between migration, employment and the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. Well managed legal migration can continue to contribute to the realisation of the Lisbon Goals and should be aligned with skills shortages and labour market requirements.”

(Brussels European Council 14 december 2007, Presidency Conclusions

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/97669.pdf, p. 6)

It must be noted that migration, „flexicurity” and the Lisbon Strategy will be the main topics for the European Commission in 2008.

(Brussels, 23 October 2007, COM (2007) 640 final Communication from the Commission to the council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Commission Legislative and Work Programme 2008

http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/programmes/docs/clwp2008_roadmap_strategic_initiatives.pdf)

Poverty is boosting by free-trade agreements: the EPAs

The fact that illegal migration is primarily caused by poverty and the lack of economic perspectives is widely recognised.

Critical voices highlight that poverty will be boosted by the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) which the EU Commission is pushing the 78 ACP-countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) to sign. There is growing opposition to the EPAs and until now only the Caribbean countries have signed the Agreement. Others have signed Interim Agreements and opposition to the EPAs is growing in Africa. All studies warn of the negative impacts of the EPAs. By signing an EPA, ACP countries will have to dramatically reduce tariffs on imported goods and open up their markets not only to industrial and agricultural products from the EU, but also to investment, services and public procurement. If developing countries are forced to undertake such a comprehensive market liberalisation, the effects on the local ACP markets will be disastrous, as ACP producers will be exposed to competition with European companies, which are much more competitive. Apart from jeopardizing food security, EPAs could also result in de-industrialisation and the collapse of entire local and national sectors of production.

Women are most affected by the EPAs as it is they who mainly work in the agricultural sector, e.g. as poultry and vegetable farmers, which will be most adversely affected by trade liberalisation and the EPAs. They will not be able to compete with highly subsidised cheap agricultural products from Europe and will thereby be driven out of business.

Bilateral trade agreements are being negotiated with India, South Korea, Central Latin American countries, and the Andean States. Opposition to these Free Trade Agreements (FTA) is rising everywhere as they jeopardise the livelihoods of millions of people. Particularly in Korea there is great protest against the FTA and allegedly half the South Korean population is against the FTA, especially workers and farmers who have seen trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement lead to job flight, decaying communities, and increased social polarisation. But what really unites Koreans against the FTA is the undemocratic nature of the negotiation process and the threat to South Korea's national sovereignty.
(<http://www.bilaterals.org/more.php?date=2007>)

All these negotiations are taking place without consultation with civil societies, trade unions and without the involvement of the national Parliaments in the 27 EU states. Even the European Parliament has very limited power and influence. Hence, the trade agreements lack any democratic legitimacy and control and the negotiations should be stopped immediately.

“EPAs – Europe's weapons of mass destruction”

One of the strongest critics of the EPAs is Aminata Traoré, the former Minister of Culture of Mali, who labelled the EPAs in an interview with a German newspaper as „Europe's weapons of mass destruction”. She said that „Europe demands competitiveness of us, yet, when it experiences competitiveness with China, it breaks out in panic; Europe sends us its chicken legs, its used cars, its out-of-date medicine and its worn out shoes, and, because your leftovers are flooding our markets, our craftspeople and farmers are being put out of business. Now China is sending its products to Europe - and these are not leftovers, but clean, competitive goods. And what does Europe do? It talks about tariffs. So I say that Africa, too, has a right to protect itself. Europe cannot panic about China and, at the same time, call on Africa to open up its markets... For us, these agreements are Europe's weapons of mass destruction.”

Ultimately all of these strategy papers and trade agreement have only one goal: to further increase market access for European companies, to liberalise all profitable economic sectors such as water, energy, health, education; to secure natural resources; to increase profits by privatising public goods and services and by using the cheapest labour, the lowest taxes and standards; in other words to implement neoliberal and imperialistic policy. If we want to combat poverty and the resulting forced migration we need a change of the economic global system. Every person should have the right to choose in which country she/he wants to live. Poverty and the deteriorating climate and increased desertification forces people to migrate from their homes, they need to have an option of choosing a new home and Europe must have an open door for these migrants.

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