

Out of sight, out of mind: Externalisation and regionalisation of migration and refugee policies

Since the summer of 2015 hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers have crossed European borders. Europe's heads of state and governments are now doing everything in their powers to gain control over the movements of those fleeing and migrating: The route via the Balkans is officially closed and deportations to Turkey have started. The relocation of border controls to countries of transit and origin - to Turkey, but also to Western and Eastern African countries - is at the centre of the EU strategy. Meanwhile people keep dying in high numbers at Europe's external borders, and the EU is prepared to sacrifice the individual right to asylum for its policy of securitisation and control. There is an urgent need for concerted answers from civil society.



Somali woman's passport washed ashore on the beach of the Greek island of Lesbos. Lesbos is only 7 kilometres away from the Turkish coast and is one of the main destinations for refugees trying to reach Europe.

Bread for the World, medico international and PRO ASYL have repeatedly and vehemently criticised Europe's policies of externalisation of border controls which lead to massive violations of the human rights of asylum seekers and migrants. These criticisms have been voiced in the context of a publication developed in co-operation with partners from the Global South (Im Schatten der Zitadelle, 2013), through panel discussions at World Social Forums and other collaborative events. The conference entitled "Aus den Augen aus dem Sinn" (Out of sight, out of mind), held on February 23, 2016, also offered opportunities for exchange and networking for refugee-, human rights- and development organisations from Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It was the unanimous finding of this collaboration that repressive policies and the defensive attitude towards refugees are unacceptable, both from a human rights and peace oriented perspective.

A new scale of the policies of externalisation

In Europe, the year 2016 has been characterised by an acceleration of policies of externalisation and shifting of controls on refugees and migrants. However, these EU strategies of externalisation and defence are by no means new. Through the Rabat conference in July 2006, the Khartoum process which was initiated in November 2014, and last year's strengthening of a EU/Turkey collaboration and EU/Africa summit in Valletta, the EU and its member states have introduced numerous action plans, programmes and projects whose aim is to deter migrants and refugees, ideally before they even reach Europe's external borders. It is made ever harder for them to even leave their countries of origin and pass through transit states, before reaching Europe's external borders, while at the same time the risk of being sent back to unsafe countries of origin or transit is increasing.

Countries of origin and transit, such as Mali, Niger and Turkey, which have all been integrated into border securitisation and the repulsion of asylum seekers and migrants, receive large sums of money as part of these arrangements. These

funds are spent on border security technology, training of border guards, readmission agreements and joint border patrols - but not on actual concepts for protection or improving reception conditions. Countries of origin and transit are also expected to collaborate in combating "human traffickers". These activities are portrayed as measures that protect refugees and migrants, but they do nothing to mitigate the root causes that compel people to flee their countries. Instead of protecting refugees, these measures force people to attempt ever more dangerous routes and to put themselves at the mercy of often dubious "service providers" in order to cross the border.

The processes and negotiations of these co-operations are usually opaque and are carried out away from the public gaze, thus impeding critical scrutiny by civil society. In their negotiations with the EU and its member states countries of origin and transit are reduced to mere vassal states to whom either money, liberalisation of visa regulations or vague mobility concessions for selected groups are promised in return for services in the combating of migration. By contrast, states who are not willing to co-operate face penalties such as trade sanctions or embargos.

Interest-driven politics at the expense of human rights

In order to "secure" European borders against migrants and refugees at the behest of the EU, human rights violations are put up with in countries of origin and transit. Border guards are taking brutal action against refugees and migrants. On paper there are measures for protection of refugees and for combating the causes of people fleeing their countries, but in practice they are not carried out. On the contrary, the root causes of forced migration are only exacerbated by lending further legitimacy to regimes responsible for human rights violations, violence and persecution by involving them in border security arrangements.

The policies of externalisation also have a dramatic effect on the societies of countries of ori-

gin and transit which are taken into service by Europe for the purposes of its own migration controls. Regional and national conflicts in the societies of these countries are ratcheted up when people are held against their will and borders controls are built up. Fragile social and political conditions, such as at the Horn of Africa, are put under further strain. In return for financial disbursements dished out by Europe refugees and migrants are intentionally kept in transit states, where it is all but impossible for them to make a living. The result is a desperate life in a holding pattern. Stigmatisation and criminalisation, promoted by politics and the media, lead to an intensification of racism and xenophobia against refugees and migrants.

The experiences of asylum seekers and migrants, be it in Turkey, Morocco or Mauritania, give rise to the suspicion that the European Union tries to meet human rights standards and strengthen institutions working to protect these standards only as long as its own interests are not compromised. Instead of generously accepting asylum seekers, building on and strengthening the great solidarity existing within civil society, improving marine rescue operations and making family reunification and legal (onward) travel into and within Europe possible, the order of the day is expulsion and isolation.

Ever more people are deprived of their rights and rendered vulnerable at the European Union's external borders. The EU-Turkey deal, so hostile towards refugees, invalidates human rights and sacrifices them to the interest-driven and unscrupulous conduct of the EU. Turkey is expected to ensure that migratory movements to Greece via the Aegean are stopped. In return, Erdogan's government has been promised up to €6bn in relief funds and visa liberalisations for Turkish nationals. In order to be able to easily deport refugees from Greece to Turkey, it is necessary to classify the latter one as a "safe third country". In the light of the human rights situation in general and the catastrophic situation of asylum seekers in the country and Turkey's geographical limitation on the Geneva Convention this is



Yazidi refugee camp Fidalnik in Diyarbakir, Turkey

completely unacceptable. Asylum seekers deported to Turkey face arbitrary detention and deportation into war zones.

In November 2014, the EU initiated the "Khartoum Process" with the nations of the African Horn - another potentially scandalous set of co-operations. Under these plans, the EU will co-operate with regimes such as Isayas Afwerki's military dictatorship in Eritrea or that of the Sudanese Dictator Omar Al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court, in the combating of "illegal" migratory movements. Internal EU documents provide evidence for far-reaching plans for the improvement of border management - support in the interest of the obstruction of fleeing. Such financial assistance goes to regimes that are among those chiefly responsible for the causes of forced migration.

The right to asylum must be upheld

Human dignity and the rights derived from it, among them the right to asylum, are non-negotiable. The EU and its member states have acknowledged the right to asylum in many international treaties, but with the focus on externalisation, the current refugee- and migration policies increasingly undermine this right. The discussed limitations and quotas for the admission

of refugees, by which a proportion of people are denied the opportunity to exercise the right to asylum, renders the notion of this right meaningless and questions the essence of the individual's right to asylum. People whose life is threatened must be given the opportunity to find protection in safe countries. Instead of being continuously undermined, this right must be consolidated. In order to safeguard it, legal and safe routes must be created, enabling people to find protection without risking their lives. The fight against so-called human traffickers and people smugglers - increasingly fought by military means - comes to nothing if these legal and safe access routes continue to be blocked.

What is needed are refugee- and migration policies that are based on human rights, solidarity and responsibility, and - equally important - a fundamental shift of perspective and policies that would enable a turn towards human development and away from militarization and securitisation.

A prerequisite for such a shift would be the realisation that problems and crises in a globalised world are interconnected and cannot simply be contained locally. A "fight against the causes of flight" that lives up to its name requires the initial confession that it is not possible to "combat" the causes of forced migration in isolation in the countries of origin, as some politicians' claims suggest. Instead, the migratory movements point towards a responsibility rooted directly in Europe: weapons exports and short-sighted interventions that further fuel conflicts instead

of creating sustainable perspectives for peace, unfair trade conditions that ruin local markets, as well as greenhouse gas emissions and the ensuing climate change, which eradicates the livelihood of many people - all these issues require fundamental political answers.

Development aid, too, must live up to its purpose and must not be abused to bring about concessions for co-operation in the control of refugees and migration from countries of origin and transit. The conditionalisation of funds intended for developmental co-operation for border security and prevention of fleeing must not continue.

Under the motto "Out of sight, out of mind", Europe's policies of externalisation aim at rendering invisible refugees and migrants, the violations of their rights and the actual causes of escape and displacement. The departure point for humane and solidary refugee policies should precisely be this: The needs and wishes of individual migrants and refugees and the welfare and the interests of the societies where they originate must be taken into account and form the basis for refugee and migration policies that are jointly carried out by countries of origin, transit and destination.

The past year has shown once again: These answers must emerge from a Europe of social movements built on solidarity. Supported by networking beyond the European borders among the social forces that are struggling for the protection of the rights of refugees and for an open-minded Europe.